

Huskers Illustrated

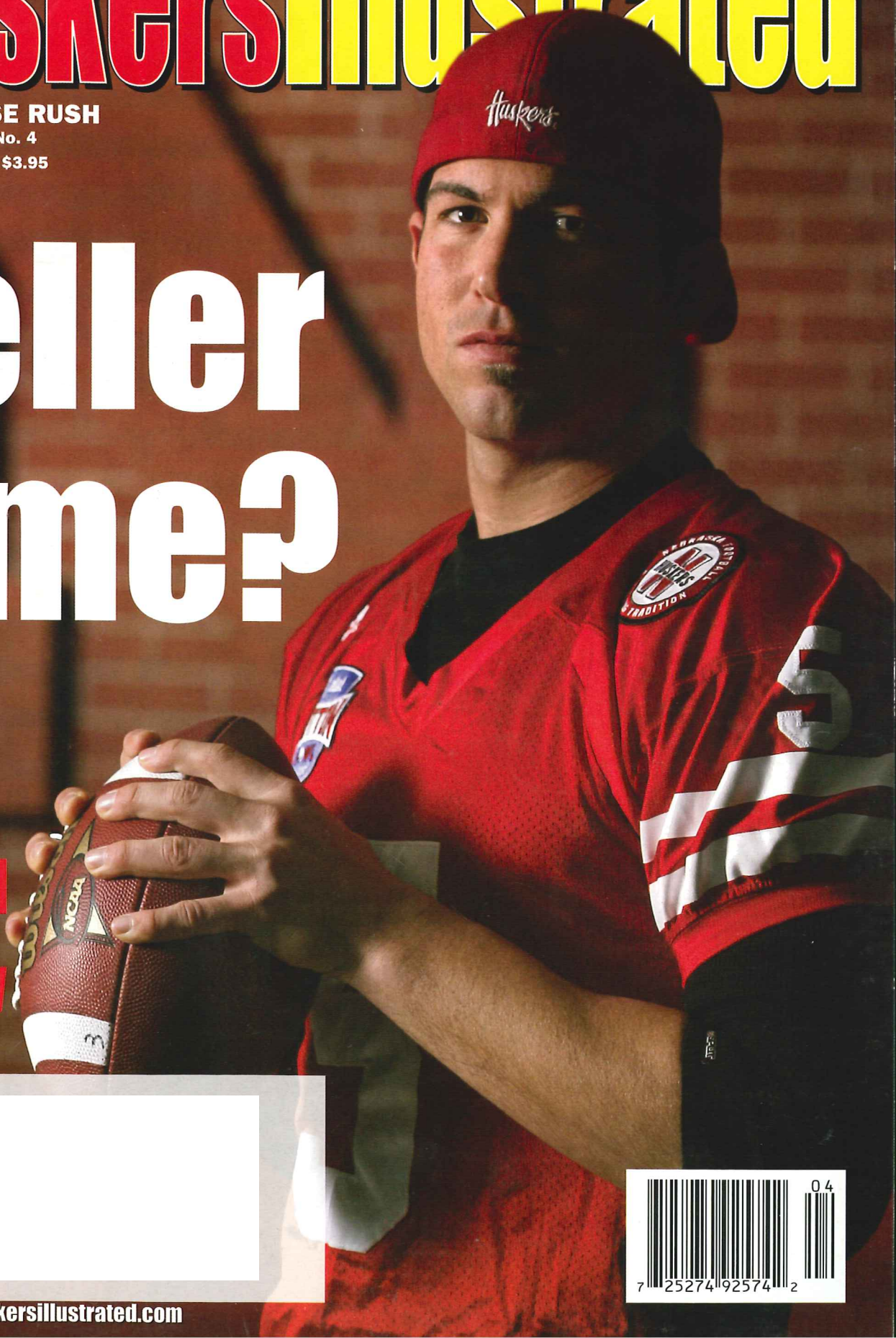
NEWS PLEASE RUSH

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Keller Time?

Spring
Football
Preview



www.huskersillustrated.com

Spring Focus

Arizona State transfer Keller hoping to earn starting spot



Brian Hill

"SAM KELLER burst out of his predecessor's shadow to quickly become one of the most dynamic quarterbacks in the nation."

That statement comes from the 2006 Arizona State Football Spring Prospectus and is preceded by: "Amid early season debates concerning his ability to replace departed legendary starter Andrew Walter, ASU's career passing leader..."

Ironically, a year later, Keller is at Nebraska and considered by many the leading candidate to replace the departed Zac Taylor, who rewrote almost all of NU's passing records in two seasons as the starter.

Last spring, it appeared that Harrison Beck would be next in line. But the most publicized member of Nebraska's 2005 recruiting class abruptly left the team early in fall camp and is now competing for the starting spot at North Carolina State.

About two weeks after Beck departed last August, another drama played out a long way from Lincoln. Keller, who passed for 2,165 yards and 20 touchdowns before a thumb injury cut short his 2005 season, was demoted shortly after being named the starter. He decided to transfer and landed in Lincoln, where he sat out the 2006 season as a redshirt and spent time directing the scout team.

Joe Ganz, meanwhile, became the top backup to Taylor, and the junior-to-be is expected to provide the stiffest competi-

tion for Keller this spring. The quarterback competition could continue into the fall.

You can read more about Keller in our spring football preview section in this edition of *Huskers Illustrated*.

While Nebraska was preparing for the 3 1/2 weeks of workouts leading up to the April 14 Red-White Spring Game, the winter sports seasons were winding down.

The NU men's basketball team, after knocking off Oklahoma State in the final regular-season game, lost to the Cowboys three days later in the Big 12

Conference Tournament in Oklahoma City. The Huskers finished 17-14 and did not receive a postseason bid. Senior point guard Charles Richardson is the subject of the season wrap-up.

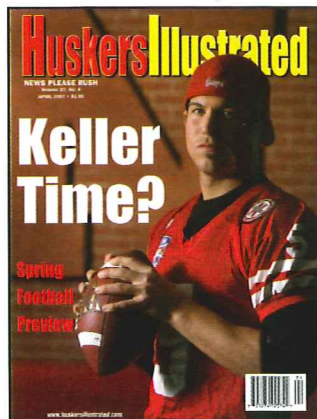
The Husker women, despite struggling down the stretch, earned an NCAA Tournament bid for the first time since 2000. Nebraska, 22-9 after an overtime loss to Iowa State in the Big 12

Tournament, received a No. 9 seed and was to play No. 8 seed Temple at Raleigh, N.C., after this edition was printed. We'll wrap up that season in the May edition.

Next month's edition will feature a complete look back at spring football, including the annual Spring Game. There will be many other story lines, but the quarterbacks always command a great deal of attention.

Keller's resume includes performances of 35-of-56 for 461 yards and four touchdowns against LSU and 26-of-45 for 347 yards and two touchdowns against USC. But that was two years ago in another program.

Once a potential first-round NFL draft pick and Heisman Trophy candidate, Keller will have to prove himself all over again in a different uniform, 1,400 miles away. ■



ON THE COVER

After sitting out last season as a transfer from Arizona State, senior Sam Keller is ready to compete for the starting quarterback spot. Cover photo by Scott Bruhn.

Huskers Illustrated

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Huskers Illustrated

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Transfer quarterback Sam Keller and his Nebraska teammates begin 3 1/2 weeks of workouts as Bill Callahan's fourth NU squad prepares for the April 14 Red-White Spring Game. *By Mike Babcock*

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The May spring football review edition will be mailed April 23. Check for updates at huskersillustrated.com.

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Wisconsin Connection

Joe Rudolph and Bill Callahan were hardly strangers before the hiring process that brought Rudolph to Nebraska. Callahan coached Rudolph at Wisconsin and again with the Philadelphia Eagles. So Callahan knows of what he speaks.

"Joe has a strong work ethic and will bring great energy to our staff," Callahan said in announcing the hiring of Rudolph as tight ends coach.

The 34-year-old Rudolph, the youngest member of Callahan's full-time staff, replaces Shawn Watson with that responsibility. Watson was promoted to quarterbacks coach and offensive coordinator following the departure of Jay Norvell.

Rudolph "has an excellent football mind and a history of success. He was part of winning teams on both the collegiate and professional level as a player and has been part of one of the top programs in the country the last three years," said Callahan.

Rudolph was at Ohio State, serving for two seasons as a graduate assistant working with the offensive line and then joining the strength and conditioning staff. He developed position-specific training for tight ends, offensive linemen and fullbacks.

Prior to going to Ohio State, Rudolph earned a master's degree in business administration from the Carnegie Mellon Tepper School of Business.

He was a first-team, All-Big Ten offensive lineman at Wisconsin in 1993 and 1994, helping the Badgers to a conference title and the Rose Bowl as a junior. The three-time academic all-conference honoree was a team captain as a senior.

"Joe Rudolph was one of the people that helped turn our program around," said Wisconsin athletic



Joe Rudolph



Ted Gilmore

director Barry Alvarez, a former Cornhusker and Badgers head coach. He "showed great leadership with our program. I know Joe was held in high regard at Ohio State, and there is no doubt he will do an outstanding job at Nebraska."

Rudolph, a native of Belle Vernon, Pa., played briefly in the NFL, including one season with the Eagles, when Callahan coached the offensive line.

He is among four members of Callahan's staff with connections to Wisconsin. Defensive coordinator Kevin Cosgrove and assistants Phil Elmassian and Bill Busch also coached for the Badgers, as did the departed Norvell.

Callahan also announced that receivers coach Ted Gilmore would take on the role of recruiting coordinator, replacing Watson in that capacity.

Gilmore played an important role in the signing seven players from Texas in the 2007 recruiting class. "Ted has contacts in the high school ranks throughout the country and that will continue to be a benefit to our program," Callahan said. "This is an excellent step forward in Ted's career and one that he has certainly earned."

Gilmore recently considered leaving Nebraska to join Lane Kiffin's staff with the Oakland Raiders but changed his mind at the last minute.

IN MEMORIAM

For 28 years, Dr. Barb Hibner served the athletic department, in particular women athletes, and by extension the university. "She gave me and Nebraska women's athletics every piece of knowledge and every ounce of energy she had," said Husker softball coach Rhonda Revelle, her successor as senior women's administrator. "There is absolutely no beginning or end to the love, admiration and respect that I have for Barbara."

Hibner, a tireless advocate of women's athletics, passed away in early March, after a battle with cancer. The Gettysburg, Pa., native was 65.

"Dr. H," as she was known by those with whom she worked, came to Nebraska from Simpson College, in 1978 as an assistant women's athletic director. She was women's athletic director from 1985 to 1994 and an associate athletic director and senior women's administrator from 1994 until she retired in December of 2005.



Dr. Barb Hibner

Here are more comments on Hibner's impact at Nebraska:

Revelle: "Most of all, Dr. Hibner has taught us all to lead by word and by example. She will be great missed. But her presence will forever be evident in each of our women's athletic programs here at Nebraska."

Steve Pederson, Nebraska athletic director: "When she arrived in 1978, few could have imagined the impact she would have on Nebraska athletics. She gave Nebraska her talents and her heart. We will always be indebted."

Robin Krapfl, Husker women's golf coach: "Dr. Hibner was an amazing person. I owe so much of who and what I am to her. She taught me how to be a better person, how to handle adversity with dignity, when to speak up and when to listen. What she has meant to the University, to women's athletics and to me is immeasurable."

Terry Pettit, former Husker volleyball coach: "She had the only kind of 'open door policy' that really matters. Her door was always open. It was open to coaches, student-athletes, custodians, fans and, in particular, anyone without pretension. She was, to paraphrase Warren Bennis, not someone who was primarily interested in singing and dancing but rather someone 'who wanted to create an environment where singers and dancers could flourish.'"

Tom Osborne, former Nebraska football coach: "Barb is responsible for much of the rise of women's athletics at Nebraska. She was a woman's athletic administrator during a time of tremendous growth in women's athletics. During her tenure, women's athletics emerged as a very important part of the athletic scene at the University of Nebraska."

Memorials can be directed to the Dr. Barbara Hibner Memorial Fund for Nebraska Athletics in care of the University of Nebraska Athletic Department Office, One Memorial Stadium, P.O. Box 880154, Lincoln, NE 68588-0154.

Quick Hits

RIGHT TO THE END

The Nebraska men's team tied Texas for the Big 12 Conference indoor championship at Ames, Iowa, thanks to a third-place finish in the meet's final event, the 4-x400-meter relay. The relay of senior Nate Probasco and freshmen Scott Wims, Daniel Christensen and Lukas Hulett turned in a season-best time of 3:07.09, while Texas failed to place in the top eight, to produce the tie.

"Our goal was to win this meet, and we got about as close to that as you can with a tie," said Nebraska coach Gary Pepin. "So we're very excited about that. We've always felt that this was one of the best conference championship meets in the country.

"If you can win a championship here, you have a heck of a team."

Team was the operative word. The Cornhusker men didn't earn a first-place finish during the two days of competition, relying on balance and four runner-up finishes to earn their ninth indoor championship in the Big 12's 11 seasons.

Nebraska finished fifth in the women's competition.

For the eighth time in 11 seasons, the conference coaches selected Pepin as the Big 12 Indoor Coach of the Year. Pepin is in his 27th season at Nebraska, coaching the women's team the first three years and both men's and women's teams since.

He has been selected as the conference outdoor coach of the year three times and has coached the Cornhuskers to 64 of their 98 conference titles all time.

Nebraska's silver medalists, men: senior Daniel Roper, long jump (25-2 1/2) and triple jump (51-8 1/4); senior Gable Baldwin, pole vault (17-1 1/4); junior Peter van der Westhuizen, 1,000 meters (2:22.41); **women:** junior Kim Shubert, pentathlon (3,859 points); sophomore Brysun Stately, pole vault (13-7 1/4).

Team scoring, men: Nebraska (93), Texas (93), Oklahoma (80.5), Missouri (79), Baylor (75), Texas Tech (70.5), Kansas (57), Colorado (51), Texas A&M (50), Iowa State (43), Kansas State (30), Oklahoma State (18).

Team scoring, women: Texas A&M (141), Texas (104), Texas Tech (93), Oklahoma (74.5), Nebraska (69.5), Kansas (52), Missouri (51), Baylor (49), Iowa State (46), Kansas State (44), Colorado (14), Oklahoma State (2).

ALL-AMERICA EFFORTS

Four Cornhusker individuals and the 4x400-meter relay of Nate Probasco, Scott Wims, Daniel Christensen and Lukas Hulett earned All-America recognition at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships at Fayetteville, Ark.

Dusty Jonas finished second in the high jump for the second time in the past three seasons, with a 7-4 1/2 effort — tying his personal best indoors. The junior from La Vernia, Texas, has earned All-America honors five times during his career, one short of Shane Lavy's school record of six All-America finishes in the high jump.

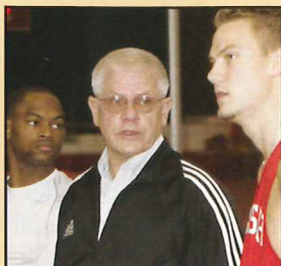
Sophomore Brysun Stately produced the only points of the week for the Husker women's team, tying for seventh in the pole vault, at 13-5 1/4. However, freshman Epley Bullock also earned All-America recognition by placing ninth in the high jump, putting her among the top eight in the event among American-born athletes. Bullock tied her career best by jumping 6-0.

In addition to the relay, which he anchored, Hulett earned All-America honors despite not advancing from the prelims in the 400-meter dash. He finished third in his heat and 11th overall but also was among the top eight American-born athletes.

Probasco and Wims advanced to the finals of the 200-meter dash, while Ben Schutter was forced to withdraw from the heptathlon competition because of an injury.

FIRST-ROUND PICK

Senior right-hander Ashley DeBuhr, a two-time All-Big 12 and All-Midwest Region pitcher, was selected by the Philadelphia Force in the first round of the National Pro Fastpitch College Draft, held at Denver, Colo., in mid-February.



Gary Pepin

DeBuhr was the eighth overall pick and third pitcher taken.

In addition to the Force, the NPF includes the New England Riptide, Akron Racers, Chicago Bandits, Rockford Thunder and Washington Glory.

Former Huskers Nicole Trimboli, Anne Steffan and Peaches James played for the Bandits last season. Steffan and Trimboli were all-star selections. Steffan finished second in the league in hitting and earned first-team all-league recognition.

James missed most of the season because of injury.

ONE AND OUT

The Big 12 softball tournament will be single-elimination this season, a move intended to alleviate the pressure on pitching as teams prepare for double-elimination play in the NCAA Tournament. "Once it was brought up, it seemed like a no-brainer," Nebraska coach Rhonda Revelle told the Omaha World-Herald.

The Big 12 Tournament is scheduled for May 10-12 at Oklahoma City.

VOLLEYBALL HIRE

Lizzy Stemke, an assistant at North Carolina the past two seasons, has joined the Husker volleyball staff as an assistant to coach John Cook. Stemke was an All-America setter at Wisconsin and played on the U.S. National Team.

She also played professionally for two seasons, in Puerto Rico and France. Cook recruited her to Wisconsin before leaving after the 1998 season.

Stemke replaces Charlene Johnson-Tagaloa.

"We were looking for a coach that not only could impact our setters but could also be a role model for our players who have aspirations of playing either professionally or internationally after their college career," Cook said in a release.

"That was something we felt was important in our program."



Lizzy Stemke

NFL COACH OF THE YEAR

Sean Payton, the NFL's coach of the year, will be among those speaking at the 2007 Nebraska Spring Coaches Clinic, March 30-31. The clinic is held in conjunction with spring practice. Others speaking at the clinic include former Kansas City Chiefs head coach Frank Gansz, Philadelphia Eagles offensive line coach Juan Castillo and Indianapolis Colts running backs coach Gene Huey, this year's "Nebraska Legends" speaker. Huey was a Cornhusker assistant from 1977 to 1986.

LUCKY FINE

Three days after being admitted to Lincoln's Bryan LGH for a "medical emergency" (March Huskers Illustrated), Cornhusker running back Marlon Lucky was released. "I have been in the hospital and have recovered fully," Lucky said in a statement through the Nebraska media relations office. "I am looking forward to getting back to classes and workouts. I want to thank everyone for their thoughts, prayers and concerns."

MURTAUGH'S GOAL

Former Cornhusker and Wisconsin football coach Barry Alvarez, now the athletic director at Wisconsin, will be the featured speaker at the annual fundraising dinner and auction for Goal, a non-profit organization established to combat childhood obesity. Former Cornhusker Jerry Murtaugh established the organization. The dinner is scheduled for May 9 in Omaha. For information go to www.goalomaha.com.

MAYBE NOT USC

Former Cornhusker place-kicker Jordan Congdon appeared to be headed to USC, but that has changed. Evan Arapostathis, Congdon's long-time kicking coach, told the Omaha World-Herald, that Congdon has visited USC and San Diego State and also is considering UCLA and California. He will have to redshirt next season. ■

A Fraction Of A Second

Potential NFL draftees find out that a small difference can mean a lot



Mike BABCOCK

"I was there for a long time, going through all kinds of mean, nasty, ugly things, and I was just having a tough time there. And they was inspecting, injecting every single part of me. And they was leaving no part untouched."

Arlo Guthrie, "Alice's Restaurant"

NO, THE ARLO GUTHRIE SONG isn't based on an experience at the NFL Scouting Combine. But the words probably provide a fitting description of what those four days in Indianapolis are like. With little sleep (interviews can last late into the night and start early in the day) and lots of prodding, time there might seem surreal.

A coach or two slammed notebooks down and started yelling at Adam Carriker, wanting to know what he would do with all the money he was going to be given, if he was going to "start smoking weed" and squander his new-found wealth.

"I started laughing," Carriker said, "because I felt like I was in trouble for something I'd never done. I was like, 'I don't understand why you're yelling at me.'"

Actually, he did understand, if not right away then soon enough. Those coaches wanted to see how he was going to react to someone getting in his face. Others took a different approach, trying to get to know him on a more personal level.

Carriker, the now former Cornhusker defensive end almost certain to be a first-round pick, discussed the combine in early March, after running the 40-yard dash during Pro Day testing. He wouldn't have participated, wouldn't have needed to, since he had been at the combine. But he was unhappy with his 40 time there.

Some scouts timed him at 4.8 seconds, some at 4.9. "If everyone would have had me at 4.8, I wouldn't have run again today," he said. "But the fact that a lot of them had me at 4.9 kind of ticked me off, so I ran again today because I'm not a 4.9."

Gil Brandt, senior analyst for NFL.com, listed the time at 4.89.

So Carriker trained some more and ran a faster 40 at Pro Day. The time he heard was 4.72, "the best I've run since I've weighed as much as I do," he said.

He weighed in at 291 pounds, right about where he expects to play.

Because of the fast track at the Hawks Championship Center, where the testing took place, "they're going to add probably a tenth of a second onto my time today," said the 6-foot-6 Carriker. "So it'll probably be a 4.8 in their minds."

He's fine with a 4.8, given his size.

A fraction of a second is a big deal to a potential draftee.

Such a small difference, 4.8 compared to 4.9, "that's a lot of money right there," Carriker said.

That's why former Cornhuskers Jay Moore and Brandon Jackson also ran 40s at Pro Test Day, even though they were timed and tested at the combine.

Moore dropped from 4.9 to, "I heard, anywhere from 4.72 to 4.78," he said. "The 40 is the most important thing, so I feel like I helped myself today."

Jackson, who was timed at 4.57 in Indianapolis, felt the same way. "Some said I ran a 4.38, some said I ran a 4.41," he said. "It was very important."

Matt Herian, who didn't attend the combine, ran a 40-yard dash at Pro Test Day, his first official timing since before suffering a broken leg against Missouri in his junior season at Nebraska. Coming back from the injury, which sidelined him for all of 2005, being timed in the 40 "wasn't

important," he said. "If I go out there and run a bad time, it could have hurt me, just thinking, 'Oh no, ta-da, ta-da . . .' So as long as I knew in myself where I was, that's all that really mattered."

If he is to be drafted, however, others need to know. He was timed at 4.7, he said, "one of my best times ever," particularly considering he weighed 242 pounds. His best 40 time is 4.67, as a Cornhusker freshman, when he was 20 pounds lighter.

"I hope it kind of re-opened some eyes," he said of his Pro Test Day numbers. "Some guys liked me before my injury and kind of questioned me afterward. So hopefully after seeing that today they see I'm back to where I was."

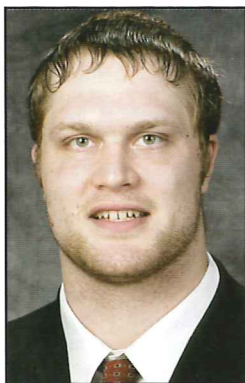
Pro Test Day was a little less demeaning than the combine, because of the familiarity of the surroundings and, of course, because of significantly fewer people.

Names are exchanged for numbers at the combine. Carriker was DL16, Moore DL 34 and Jackson RB15, and when you're standing in line, in nothing but underwear, you're thinking, "I'm just a slab of meat right now," said Carriker.

"That's part of the process. You get used to it. It's not a big deal. It's a business. They're not trying to make friends. They're trying to make money and win games."

Jackson extended the meat metaphor slightly, meat "in a grinder," he said.

It can be mentally taxing. But then, "they're not going to give you a lot of money for nothing," Carriker said. "So it's definitely tough." ■



Adam Carriker is expected to be a first-round draft pick.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for nearly 30 years. Mike can be reached at MBABCOCK1@neb.rr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

Winding Road

Coach sees many twists and turns during NU's season-opening travels



Curt McKEEVER

THERE ARE TIMES when Mike Anderson's 2007 Nebraska baseball team frustrates him to no end.

Like on March 4 at the Stetson Invitational in Deland, Fla., where the Huskers blew an eight-run lead against Iowa and got beat 12-8, then immediately followed that with a 16-6, run-rule loss to Notre Dame.

Then, there are the days that might leave Anderson thinking he'll end up with his all-time favorite squad.

For instance, take NU's three-game series at defending Southeastern Conference champion and then-No. 13 Alabama the weekend after the Stetson Invitational. Somehow, with preseason All-American pitcher Tony Watson giving up the highest run total in 43 career appearances, and heart-of-the-lineup hitters Ryan Wehrle, Jake Opitz and Andy Gerch going a combined 4-for-36, the Huskers took two of three games.

Nebraska came back from its first shutout loss in 201 games to win a pair of one-run decisions by taking an aggressive offensive approach against the Crimson Tide's 2006 Team USA pitcher Tommy Hunter before taking the rubber contest thanks to hustling plays such as when they scored two runs on an infield hit.

"It's just good to see the kids respond that way against a great team," Anderson said. "If we win games, we're going to be doing that kind of stuff. I really think it creates a feel for who we are. We may not do it all the time, but it just gives us an impression we bust our tails."

Attitude, of course, has been the key to Nebraska rising up from the bottom of the Big 12 Conference the last decade to become one of the nation's elite programs. Seldom do you find the Huskers lamenting their built-in disadvantage of being from a northern climate.

This year, NU didn't conduct its first workout in Haymarket Park until March 7, two days before the series at Alabama. Additionally, Anderson left players behind on each of the first three trips for disciplinary reasons, so it adds up that his club would go through some corkscrew-like swings of momentum while building an 8-5 record playing exclusively on the road.

"There's a lot of twists and turns and 'oohs' and 'aahs,'" he said. "We turned two double plays (on the second weekend) against Rice (and) it was like, 'You've got to be kidding me? That's incredible.' And then we had two double plays that we should've turned that you said, 'You've got to be kidding me? That's incredible that we didn't.'"

"I see a lot of incredible stuff, but . . . there's an element of youngness with this team that maybe I haven't seen. We have the potential to explode, but we also have the potential to implode."

You can see why, at the least, the season should be riveting.

"I'm excited," Anderson said. "If I realistically look at the circumstances of our first two months, we've had some things with weather and leaving guys at home, and I think we're incredibly a very sound team when it comes to the bonding and all those things."

Watson, who as the Friday night starter will set the tone for league series, has an enthusiasm that matches his coach's.

At the team's preseason banquet, the left-handed junior spoke about Nebraska's winning attitude and "how it filters through from the top, how we're always going to win games. We always expect to win no matter who we're going up against."

At 8-5, Nebraska would have had to go 28-1 over its next 29 games to match last year's incredible 36-6 start.

The real goal, however, will be to avoid 2006's 6-11 finish. That ending included a brief surge to the championship game of the Big 12 Tournament that helped secure a No. 6 national seed for the NCAA championships, but was followed by a shocking 0-2 showing on its home field in the NCAA regional.

In the early going of 2007, Anderson has seen enough signs to be optimistic that the Huskers will stick together while attempting to get a consistent rhythm going.

After the rough day in the Stetson Tournament, Nebraska came back to beat the host school, handing the Hatters' starting pitcher just his fourth loss in 28 home appearances.

Earlier, they'd responded from a loss to Rice by beating then-No. 27 Florida Atlantic. And then there was the trip to Alabama.

"I've had confidence in this team from day one," said junior two-way player Steve Edlefsen. "You're supposed to say that, but I really have. We

really have talented guys and it's just a matter of time before guys start gelling."

Edlefsen — a junior in his second season with the Huskers, but first as a pitcher — came in from right field to record his first two saves in the wins against the Crimson Tide. He also provided a clutch relief performance in the one-run victory against Florida Atlantic. "I really like the momentum we have going," he said after the series in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

So, too, did Anderson, though he was realistic enough to believe there'd be more than just smooth sailing ahead.

"We just need to be able to sustain our growth," Anderson said. "When we have good years, we continue to grow as a team. When we just have average years, I think we're prepared but we just kind of stay stagnant."

"We've gone through a lot, but I think we'll continue to improve. We're not going to play perfect every day, but I like the kids' resilience." ■

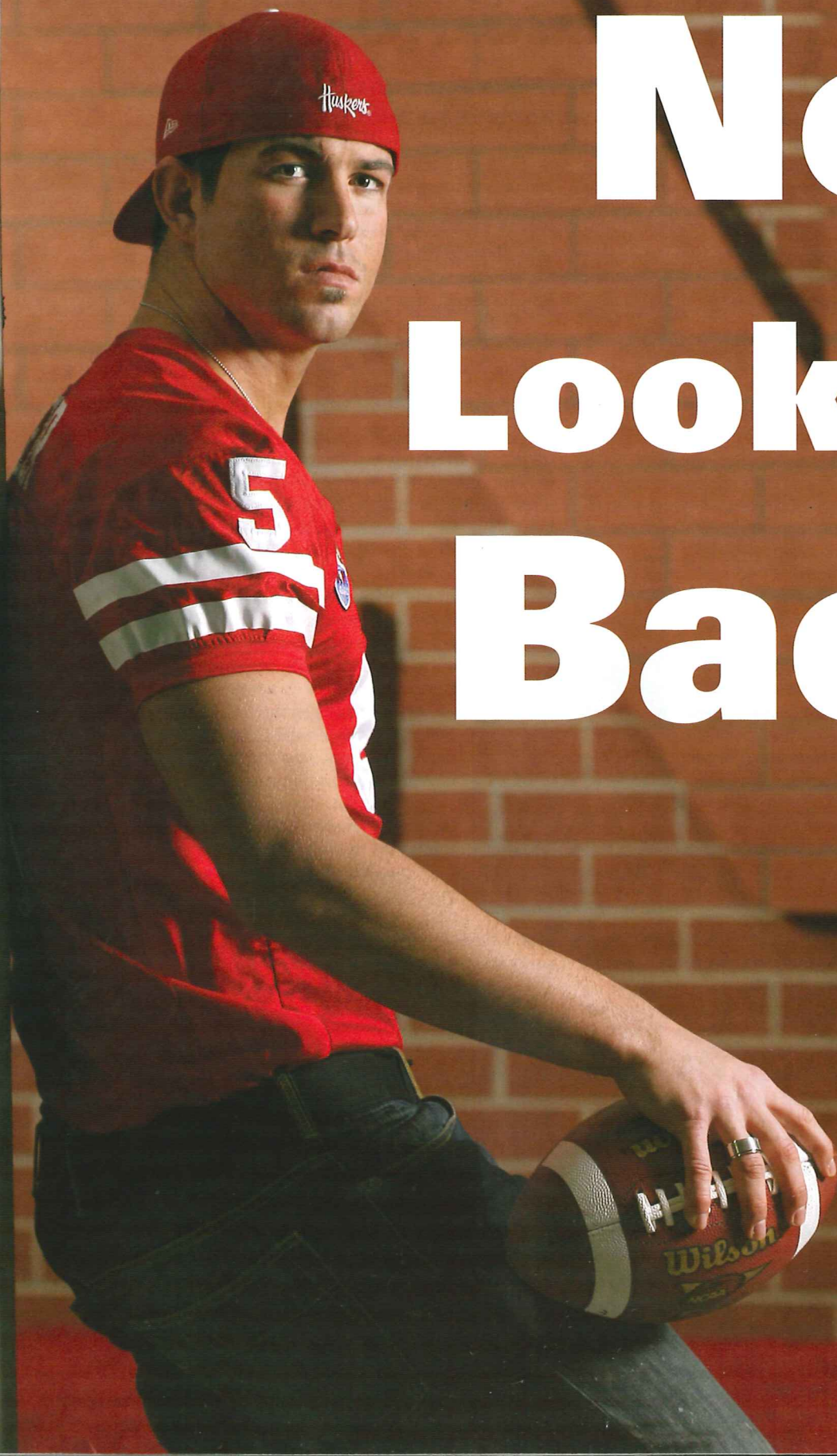


Mike Anderson's Huskers won two of three at Alabama.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football, he is the primary beat writer for baseball. Curt can be reached at cmckeever@journalstar.com

FEATURE STORY

No Looking Back



SPRING FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Stories By Mike Babcock

Photos By Scott Bruhn

'When you make a decision, you go full speed ahead to the direction you chose'

Sam Keller couldn't remember for sure. It might have been the Olive Garden restaurant in Lincoln. The location wouldn't have been important except that the reporter wanted a specific place to validate the assertion. So Olive Garden it was.

The exact details escaped him because it had happened more than once or twice, not just there. "If I think of another one, I'll tell you," he said, "sorry."

In any case, a stranger had approached in the restaurant and wished him luck, told him that Nebraska football fans were "expecting big things" from him.

Keller described the brief encounter as if he were holding something valuable. "To be honest with you, within the first two or three months I was here, I'd go certain places and they'd know me more around here than they did after three years down there. And that's the truth," he said. "I think that's just the nature of Big 12 football or big, huge programs where football really means something to people.

"I think it's completely different here."

"Down there" is Arizona State, where Keller spent his first three years of college. And he was hardly anonymous there, especially during his junior season. He started seven games for the Sun Devils, and in his own words was "on fire."

During a three-game stretch, he passed for 1,235 yards and 12 touchdowns without an interception. "I was coming into my own," he said.

Then he suffered an injury to his right thumb. That ended his junior season. And, as it turned out, that's how the potential first-round NFL draft pick and Heisman Trophy candidate in 2006 ended up directing the Cornhusker scout team.

Watching from the remainder of the 2005 season from the sideline "was a tough time in my life, being on fire like that, having 20-something touchdowns in five or six games and then having to sit and watch, having your job up in the air," said Keller.

In fact, he completed 155-of-264 passes (58.7 percent) for 2,165 yards and 20 touchdowns with nine interceptions during his injury-shortened season. To put those numbers in perspective, Zac Taylor completed 237-of-430 passes

SAM KELLER AT ARIZONA STATE

Year	G/GS	Cmp	Att	Int	Pct	Yds	Yds/G	TD
2003	6/0	23	43	1	53.5	247	41.2	1
2004	6/1	42	71	1	59.2	606	101.0	5
2005	8/7	155	264	9	58.7	2165	270.6	20
Totals	20/8	220	378	11	58.2	3018	150.9	26

(55.1 percent) for 2,653 yards and 19 touchdowns with 12 interceptions as a junior.

Taylor's statistics spiked in 2006, of course, as he became more comfortable in coach Bill Callahan's offense, another reason Keller is here.

Nebraska's system is similar in many ways to Arizona State's, though "the complexity's different," Keller said. And it's an NFL system.

"It's a professional offense. So I think as far as terminology and the things we can do under center, (they) are more advanced than what I did at ASU," he said.

The 6-foot-4, 230-pound Keller would seem to have an NFL future, even though he's taking nothing for granted, yet another reason he left Arizona State.

Keller, who would have been a captain, isn't reluctant to talk about his decision to transfer, though that's in the past and he's looking ahead, he said.

Now-former Sun Devils' coach Dirk Koetter (he was fired after a 7-6 season) and his assistants "made a business decision to go in a certain direction that they thought was best for their team," said Keller. "You have to respect that."

After an unexpected demotion, Keller was left with a business decision of his own. "You can stay there and bite the bullet and sit on the sideline and watch," he said. "But I'm not a guy who likes to watch. And so instead of just sitting and waiting and saying, 'Oh, I'm going to make the League anyway,' I didn't take that approach."

Keller didn't want to "roll the dice" on his NFL future. Rather, he wanted to "come and play where I know I was going to have an opportunity," he said.

"Coach Callahan made it very clear that I had an opportunity to play here. So something set in stone, I'm going to go for that rather than roll the dice."



Junior Joe Ganz (12, right) was the top backup to senior starter Zac Taylor (13). Ganz played in five games and completed 7-of-13 passes for 122 yards and three touchdowns.

The opportunity was set in stone, not that he would have the starting job. Despite the publicity surrounding his transfer, Keller is quick to defer to those already here, in particular junior-to-be Joe Ganz, his main competition this spring.

During a 30-minute interview in late February, Keller mentioned Ganz several times, unsolicited. "Joe's going in there with the same attitude. Joe wants this thing just as bad," Keller said. "Joe can do it, too. It's not like we're at each other's throats competing, but obviously, we're both working hard at this thing and he deserves every bit as much, you know, credit or opportunity that I'm getting right now."

Ganz told the Lincoln Journal Star that he's never wanted anything more than he wants the job. And he has prepared accordingly in the off-season.

"He can rattle off these plays and get the offense going. That's where I need to get. As far as what I need to

do, I've got to get quick like Joe and then I'll have a chance," Keller said. "That's one thing the fans should understand about the complexity of this offense and should understand about a guy like Joe. It takes a little bit more than just stepping in because you've got some feathers in your hat."

Keller has been sensitive to his new teammates from the beginning. Though he describes himself as outgoing, he waited to speak up.

"I appreciated how guys were open to me because it's not an easy deal when you've got a guy on the front page of the newspaper for three days and you're thinking, 'I'm here working my butt off and who's this guy?' So I took it as a personal goal to make sure these guys knew that, 'Hey, I'm coming in to help. That's what the attention was about, but don't think I'm any better than any of you guys,'" he said.

Keller hasn't been motivated by a desire to prove anything to Arizona State. As mentioned earlier, he has

moved on. He's not looking back.

Besides, "you know what, I already showed them (Sun Devil fans)," he said. "I don't need to show anybody something they already know. When I came here and I signed those (scholarship) papers . . . I became a Cornhusker right away."

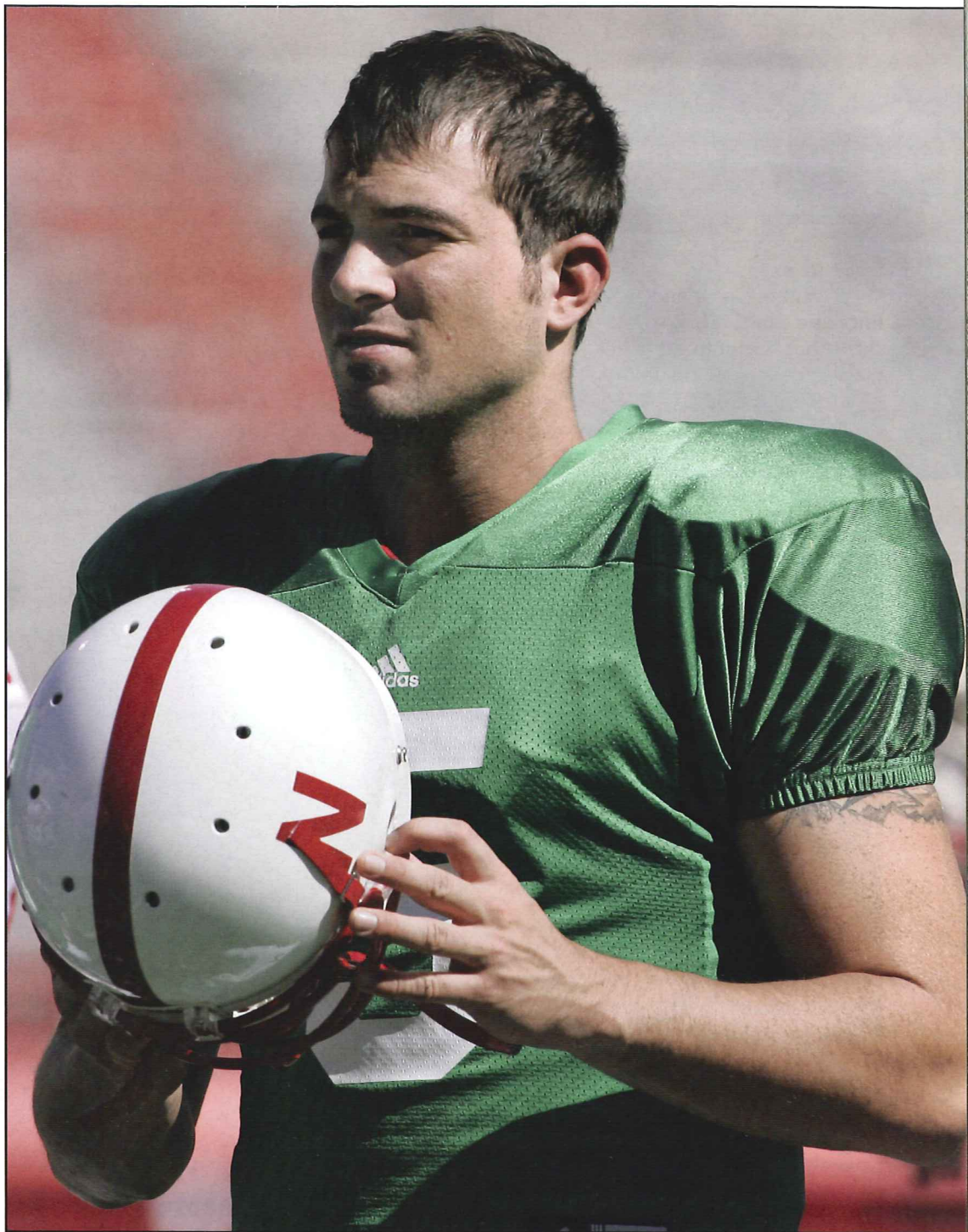
"When you make a decision, you go full speed ahead to the direction you chose. If you look back, if you're hesitant or if you're second-guessing a decision you made, you're not going to be effective as a quarterback or as a person."

About the only thing he brought with him from Arizona State is a desire to wear a No. 9 jersey, which he also wore in high school in Danville, Calif.

Even though he would have worn No. 2 at Arizona State last season, in honor of a high school teammate and friend who was seriously injured in an automobile accident, when he sees himself on a football field, he's in a No. 9 jersey.

"I took it as a personal goal to make sure these guys knew that, 'Hey, I'm coming in to help. That's what the attention was about, but don't think I'm any better than any of you guys.' "

— **Sam Keller**



Sam Keller practiced with the team last fall while sitting out as a redshirt after transferring from Arizona State.

He wore No. 5 in the fall. Redshirt freshman wide receiver Will Henry wore No. 9 on the offense — defensive back Bryan Wilson also wore the number. Henry agreed to trade numbers, said Keller. "He was a good guy about it."

Keller figured he would wear No. 5 in the spring before making the change. "They have their ways of doing it," he said of the assigning of numbers.

"But I think I'll be No. 9 in the fall, which I hope."

He has maintained contact with some of his teammates at Arizona State and with his best friend and roommate there. "But as far as my allegiance as a Sun Devil that was completely severed when I came here," he said. "I'm a Cornhusker now."

"If I have the chance to go to the NFL and, God willing, I'm in a Monday Night Football game where you state what college you went to, I'm going to state 'University of Nebraska.' That's what I'm going to

say. 'I'm a Nebraska Cornhusker.'

"This is a pretty cool thing to be able to say."

It also has been pretty cool when strangers know his name.

"I always look to keep a low profile," he said. "I want to be high-profile on the football field. Off the football field, I'm a guy that can be approached by anybody. Anybody can come up and I'll be the same guy every time."

As several Cornhusker fans have already discovered . . . ■

FEELS LIKE A FRESHMAN

Even though this will be his final spring at Nebraska, Brett Byford doesn't dread what can be a grind for some, what with no games for which to prepare. In fact, "I feel like a freshman," the junior center said. "I'm ready to go."

"I want to go in and really, really fine-tune stuff. This sounds like a cliché but I want to get better. I don't want to miss a day for anything."

For him, this spring will be different from those in the past because, "I'm actually coming off some playing time, which will be unique," he said.

Byford got more than "some" playing time. With Kurt Mann sidelined by illness, he stepped in. And he never stepped out, starting all but the opening game.

Prior to last season, Byford had played only once. "It's really unbelievable in a way, really amazing," he said. "That was one of those things where, 'Man, thank you God.' I've come a long way in 12 months, or eight months, whatever it is."

Despite the one brief appearance in three seasons, the first as a redshirt, Byford never lost his focus, a tribute to his religious faith, he said. He played well last spring, expecting to back up Mann, a two-year starter. His motivation was to put himself in a position where "if I did get the chance, I wouldn't mess it up," said Byford.

"So it's pretty cool the way it all worked out."

That should be a lesson to Nebraska's young offensive linemen, to all of the Cornhuskers, young and old alike on both sides of the ball, as spring practice begins on March 21 and concludes with the Red-White game on April 14.

Byford is among three returning starters in the offensive line. The others are Matt Slauson and Mike Huff, who will miss spring practice after undergoing surgery for an Achilles tendon injury suffered during winter conditioning.

Slauson is expected to settle in at guard, where he practiced late last season after starting the first 11 games at right tackle before being injured.

The switch to guard is permanent. At least, "right now it is," coach Bill



Senior center Brett Byford is one of three returning starters in the offensive line.

Callahan said a week before spring practice was to begin. "There's flexibility."

Flexibility has been an offensive line theme since Callahan arrived, which is why there's bound to be more shuffling up front this spring.

For one thing, Carl Nicks will move from right tackle, where he started the final three games last season, to the all-important left tackle.

Redshirt freshmen Keith Williams, D.J. Jones and Cruz Barrett will have an opportunity to position themselves on the depth chart as offensive line coach Dennis Wagner replaces Greg Austin and Chris Patrick, last season's other starters.

Austin completed his eligibility, and Patrick decided to forego his final collegiate season and enter the NFL's Supplemental Draft in the summer.

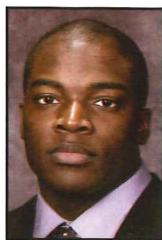
SHOW TIME IN THE SECONDARY

Zack Bowman will be held out of contact this spring, as a precautionary measure, as he comes back from the knee injury that sidelined him last season. But his return gives the secondary three cornerbacks with starting experience.

Add Armando Murillo, one of four junior college transfers who arrived for second semester, and the Cornhuskers have a fourth corner who is good enough to start, Bowman said. "We all know we're going to play, to that's no biggie for us."

Tierre Green, who started every game at strong safety last season, has moved to free safety, opening up competition on the strong side.

The emphasis of the secondary in the spring, and next season, "is to make plays," Bowman said.



Zack Bowman

"Last year, we felt like we didn't make enough plays or make plays of any kind to help out the defense and the offense. So this year, we're focusing on making them, just getting pass breakups and forcing fumbles, interceptions."

His goal is to "kind of get the fans up on their feet because sometimes when (standing on the sideline) I turned back (to look), everybody was like, 'Hmmm, this is boring.' We're going to try to add some excitement this year."

Nothing is more exciting than intercepting a pass and returning it for a touchdown, and celebrating a little bit while running it back. You have to restrain yourself "when you get to the end zone," said Bowman. "But on the way to the end zone, whew, you can do anything you want to do, just as long as you make it."

BITS AND PIECES

● Several players will change positions, most notably Bo Ruud, the starting weakside linebacker and the team's fourth-leading tackler. Ruud will move to strongside linebacker, replacing the departed Stewart Bradley. "That'll be an outstanding position for Bo, the way we're play-

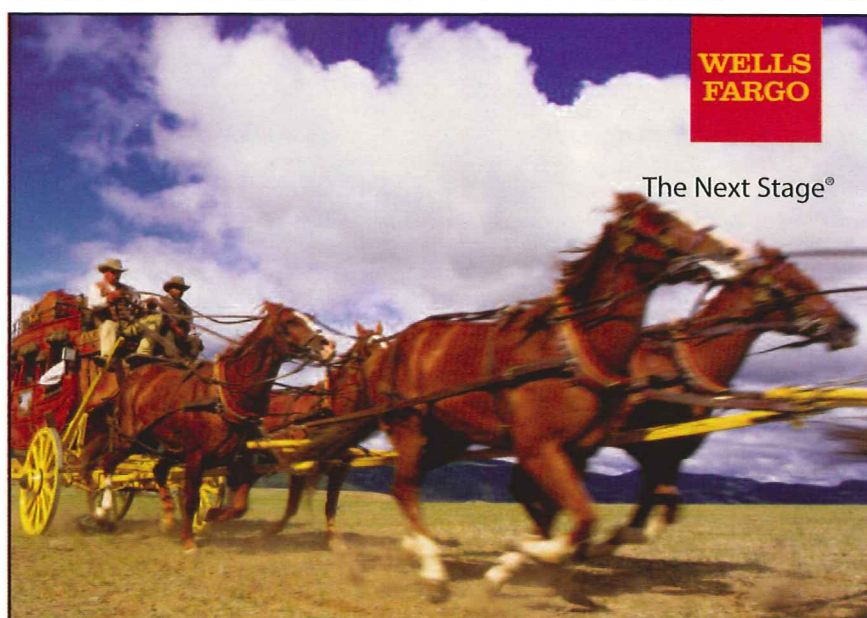
ing coverage, what we're asking the SAM to do in coverage. Also, in terms of his blitzing, it will be an ideal spot for Bo."

● In addition to Huff, among those players who will miss spring practice because of injuries are: Barry Turner, Kenny Wilson, Corey Young, Seth Jensen, Jacob Hickman, Mike McNeill, Matt Senske, Craig Roark and Zac Lee, a junior college transfer.

● The situation at I-back is such that sophomore-to-be Major Culbert will practice there in the spring, even though his future is probably as a safety. With Wilson out and Cody Glenn cleared but day-to-day, the position will be thin. ■



Starting weakside linebacker Bo Ruud will move to strongside linebacker.



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2007 SPRING ROSTER

Source: Huskers.com

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown (school)
95	Allen, Pierre	DL	6-5	225	RFr.	Denver, Colo. (Thom. Jefferson)
	Asante, Larry	S	6-1	205	So.	Alexandria, Va. (Coffeyville, Kan., CC)
	Barfield, Shukree	DT	6-4	310	Jr.	Camden, N.J. (Garden City, Kan., CC)
66	Barrett, Cruz	OL	6-4	320	RFr.	Daytona Beach, Fla. (Mainland)
56	Baumgartner, Justin	LS	6-2	240	Jr.	Cheyenne, Wyo. (Chadron St./Laramie Co., Wyo., CC)
52	Benzel, Bryan	LS	6-2	260	So.	Alliance, Neb.
57	Bergland, Dennis	OL	6-1	305	RFr.	Plattsmouth, Neb.
14	Bowman, Zackary	CB	6-2	195	Sr.	Anchorage, Alaska (Bartlett/N.M. Military Institute)
40	Brandenburgh, Lance	LB	6-1	230	Sr.	Overland Park, Kan. (Aquinas)
1	Brooks, Chris	WR	6-2	200	So.	St. Louis, Mo. (Hazelwood E.)
21	Brothers, Titus	SS	5-11	195	Sr.	San Antonio, Texas (Judson)
59	Byford, Brett	OL	6-3	300	Sr.	Hartselle, Ala.
82	Cammack, Wes	WR	5-11	185	So.	DeWitt, Neb. (Tri County)
62	Christensen, Andy	OL	6-3	300	Jr.	Bennington, Neb.
45	Covey, Nick	LB	6-2	235	So.	Glendale, Ariz. (Mount. Ridge)
6	Culbert, Major	DB	6-0	200	So.	Harbor City, Calif. (Narbonne)
15	Davis, Beau	QB	6-4	185	Jr.	Venice, Calif.
52	Dillard, Phillip	LB	6-1	245	So.	Tulsa, Okla. (Jenks)
94	Egger, Zach	PK	5-11	180	RFr.	Wood River, Neb.
46	Eisenhart, Ben	DB	5-11	200	Sr.	Culbertson, Neb.
26	Erickson, Dan	WR	6-1	195	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Papio-LaVista)
47	Farino, Paul	FB	6-0	270	So.	East Meadow, N.Y. (Kellenberg)
27	Ford, Ryan	DB	5-11	170	So.	Winfield, Ala.
12	Ganz, Joe	QB	6-1	200	Jr.	Palos Heights, Ill. (Stagg)
39	Glassman, Dan	TE	6-4	245	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Creighton Prep)
34	Glenn, Cody	IB	6-0	230	Jr.	Rusk, Texas (Rusk)
30	Green, Tierre	S	6-1	200	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Benson)
2	Grixby, Cortney	CB	5-9	170	Ar.	Omaha, Neb. (Central)
75	Haines, Victory	OL	6-7	290	Sr.	Logan, Utah (Snow, Utah, College)
7	Hardy, Frantz	WR	6-1	180	Sr.	Miami, Fla. (Washington/Butler County, Kan., CC)
80	Harvey, David	DE	6-4	245	So.	La Plata, Md. (McDonough)
90	Henery, Alex	P	6-2	170	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Burke)
9	Henry, Will	WR	6-5	195	RFr.	El Paso, Texas (J.M. Hanks)
67	Hickman, Jacob	OL	6-4	280	So.	Bakersfield, Calif. (Centennial)
86	Hill, Sean	TE	6-3	250	Sr.	Lisle, Ill. (Naperville North)
4	Holt, Menelik	WR	6-4	215	So.	San Diego, Calif. (St. Augustine)
61	Huff, Mike	OL	6-4	305	Jr.	Ralston, Neb.
91	Jensen, Seth	DT	6-3	275	RFr.	Fort Morgan, Colo.
71	Jepson, Zach	DT	6-2	240	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
96	Johnson, Brandon	DT	6-3	315	Sr.	Chicago, Ill. (Graceland/Compton, Calif., CC)
25	Jones, Andre	DB	6-0	195	Sr.	Fort Walton Beach, Fla. (Choctawhatchee/Fresno City, Calif., CC/Kentucky)
73	Jones, D.J.	OL	6-5	315	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Central)
5	Keller, Sam	QB	6-4	230	Sr.	Danville, Calif. (San Ramon Valley/Arizona St.)
19	Kester, Tyler	P	6-1	200	Sr.	Clearwater, Neb.
30	Kitzul, Patrick	WR	6-1	190	RFr.	Driftwood, Texas (Drppng Spgs)
40	Koehler, Colton	FB	6-1	225	So.	Harvard, Neb.
36	Lawson, Thomas	RB	6-0	230	Jr.	Parker, Colo. (Ponderosa)
	Lee, Zac	QB	6-2	205	So.	San Francisco, Calif. (San Francisco City College)
20	Lucky, Marlon	IB	6-0	210	Jr.	North Hollywood, Calif.
89	Luhrs, Kevin	DE	6-1	260	Sr.	Omaha, Neb. (Creighton Prep)
35	Makovicka, Justin	FB	6-1	225	RFr.	Brainard, Neb. (East Butler)
63	Martin, Ben	DE	6-4	265	RFr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)
55	McBride, Nathan	LS	6-1	205	So.	Scottsdale, Ariz. (Chaparral)
78	McEwen, Robbie	LS	6-0	235	Jr.	North Platte, Neb. (Drake Univ.)
13	McKeon, Corey	LB	6-1	225	Sr.	Naperville, Ill. (North)
58	McNeil, Andy	LB	6-1	235	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Skutt)
44	McNeill, Mike	TE	6-4	215	RFr.	Kirkwood, Mo.
	Mendoza, Marcus	RB	5-10	175	Fr.	Houston, Texas (Spring Woods)
38	Moore, Kyle	LB	6-2	220	RFr.	Elkhorn, Neb.
81	Mueller, Josh	TE	6-5	265	Sr.	Columbus, Neb. (Lakeview)
	Murillo, Armando	CB	6-0	195	Jr.	Tampa, Fla. (East. Arizona CC)
76	Murtha, Lydon	OL	6-7	315	Jr.	Hutchinson, Minn.
77	Nicks, Carl	OL	6-5	325	Sr.	Salinas, Calif. (Hartnell JC/New Mexico State)
83	Nunn, Terrence	WR	6-0	185	Sr.	Houston, Texas (Cypress Falls)
33	O'Hanlon, Matt	SS	5-11	200	Jr.	Bellevue, Neb. (Bellevue East)
82	O'Leary, T.J.	LS	6-1	245	Jr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North/New Mexico State)
15	Octavien, Steve	LB	6-0	235	Sr.	Naples, Fla. (Lely/William R. Harper, Ill., College)
17	Peterson, Todd	WR	6-4	210	Jr.	Grand Island, Neb. (Cent. Cath.)
85	Phillips, J.B.	TE	6-3	245	Sr.	Colleyville, Texas (Heritage)
69	Picou, Jordan	OL	6-2	300	Sr.	Rialto, Calif. (Eisenhower/Mt. San Antonio, Calif., CC)
98	Potter, Zach	DE	6-7	280	Jr.	Omaha, Neb. (Creighton Prep)
86	Poulosky, Andy	DE	6-2	260	Sr.	Ponca, Neb.
16	Purify, Maurice	WR	6-4	210	Sr.	Eureka, Calif. (San Francisco City College)
85	Rice, Thomas	DE	6-1	240	Sr.	Lincoln, Neb. (East)
63	Roark, Craig	DL	6-2	295	So.	Ada, Okla.
84	Rucker, Xavier	WR	5-6	160	RFr.	Minneapolis, Minn. (Breck)
51	Ruud, Bo	LB	6-3	235	Sr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
48	Sand, Andy	TE	6-2	225	Sr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southeast)
42	Senske, Matt	FB	6-3	235	Sr.	Bellevue, Neb. (Bellevue East)
88	Sievers, Clayton	DE	6-4	240	Jr.	Elkhorn, Neb.
70	Slauson, Matt	OL	6-5	335	Jr.	Colorado Springs, Colo. (Air Force Prep)
97	Smith, Mike	OL	6-6	265	RFr.	Las Vegas, Nev. (Palo Verde)
43	Steinkuhler, Ty	DL	6-3	280	Jr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)
91	Such, Michael	P	6-2	205	RFr.	Allen, Texas
93	Suh, Ndamukong	DL	6-4	305	So.	Portland, Ore. (Grant)
84	Sullivan, Tony	DE	6-3	230	Wr.	Wahoo, Neb. (Neumann)
87	Swift, Nate	WR	6-2	195	Jr.	Hutchinson, Minn.
46	Tasa, Ben	TE	6-4	210	RFr.	Humphrey, Neb. (St. Francis)
89	Teafatiller, Hunter	TE	6-3	220	Jr.	Kingsburg, Calif. (San Joaquin)
3	Thenarse, Rickey	DB	6-0	185	So.	Los Angeles, Calif. (Jordan)
97	Titchener, Dan	P	6-0	200	Jr.	Cheyenne, Wyo. (East)
99	Turner, Barry	DL	6-3	250	Jr.	Antioch, Tenn. (Brentwood Academy)
4	Watson, Adam	S	6-0	185	RFr.	Lincoln, Neb. (Niwt, Colo.)
37	Wesch, Jake	PK	6-1	200	Jr.	North Bend, Neb.
22	West, Anthony	DB	6-0	195	RFr.	San Diego, Calif. (Point Loma)
68	Williams, Keith	OL	6-5	310	RFr.	Florissant Hill, Calif. (McClure North)
28	Wilson, Bryan	CB	6-1	200	Sr.	Granada Hills, Calif. (Pierce, Calif., College)
27	Wilson, Kenny	IB	6-0	220	Sr.	Liberal, Kan. (Butler County, Kan., CC)
	Witt, Patrick	QB	6-4	215	Fr.	Wylie, Texas
53	Wortman, Tyler	LB	6-3	230	Jr.	Grand Island, Neb. (Cent. Cath.)
23	Young, Corey	DB	6-0	195	So.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)
49	Young, Dreu	TE	6-4	215	RFr.	Cozad, Neb.

Local Talent

10-12 in-state prospects could get Div. I offers

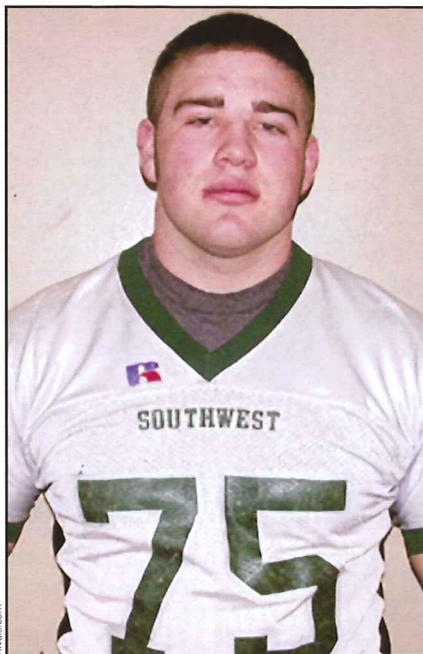
By Rick Shaw

Nebraska head coach Bill Callahan isn't about to take the local talent for granted. He's well aware that in-state players formed the backbone of past Husker championship football teams.

Little more than mid-way through their junior years of high school, four Nebraska high school juniors already have earned scholarship offers from the home-state Huskers. A fifth junior — Ronnell Grixby (brother of current Husker Cortney Grixby and former Husker DeAntae Grixby) — previously held an offer from Nebraska. However, the NU staff, for unspecified reasons, took the offer off the table this past winter.

As it stands, as many as 10-12 in-state prospects could land Division I scholarship offers in the current recruiting cycle.

Here is an early look at picks for the top five Nebraska prep prospects for the upcoming recruiting year:



Baker Steinkuhler

1. Baker Steinkuhler

The 6-foot-6, 290-pound offensive tackle from Lincoln Southwest High School is the most highly regarded offensive line prospect to come out of the state of Nebraska in more than a decade. A first-team Super-State selection as both a sophomore and a junior, Steinkuhler delivered an oral commitment to Nebraska in early September.

"I'm really excited," Steinkuhler said. "That (playing for NU) is what I really wanted. I'm really happy. My mom is real happy for me."

"It (committing to NU) was what I

wanted to do. I want to stay home, don't want to go anywhere else."

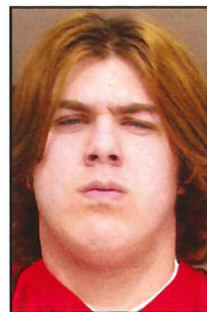
Baker, the son of former Husker All-American Dean Steinkuhler and brother of current Husker defensive lineman Ty Steinkuhler, was chosen to the Rivals 100 Juniors to watch for the class of 2008. He's projected to be ranked among the nation's top offensive tackle prospects by Rivals with a solid shot of earning a five-star rating (generally given to only the nation's top 25-30 overall prospects) by that same service.

"I've coached two guys that have played in the NFL and several Division I scholarship athletes," Southwest coach Mark King said, "but Baker is the best athlete that I've ever coached. And that includes guys that play on Sunday."

"His future is tremendous. You hate to jump ahead too far, but I think he can make a lot of money playing this game. He's just unbelievable."

2. Trevor Robinson

The 6-5, 300-pound offensive guard out of Elkhorn High School represents another national recruit from inside the state's borders. A first-team all-state selection as a junior,



Trevor Robinson

NEBRASKA COMMITMENTS FOR 2008

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	40	Hometown (School)
Dan Hoch	OL	6-6	295	5.21	Harlan, Iowa
Collins Okafor	RB	6-1	210	4.54	Omaha, Neb. (Westside)
Baker Steinkuhler	OL	6-6	290	4.88	Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)

For more daily recruiting information, visit HuskersIllustrated.com, a member of the Rivals.com network.

Robinson was also named to the Rivals 100 Juniors to watch for the class of 2008.

Unlike Steinkuhler, Robinson did not make an early commitment to the home state school. As a result, he's racked up a number of scholarship offers over the past six months, including offers from Boston College, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Notre Dame and Texas A&M.

With a 5.2-second 40-yard dash and 355-pound bench press, Robinson will be a huge pickup for one lucky school next February. Though the Fighting Irish and Wolverines are both high on his list of choices, Robinson admits that the Huskers are also at or near the top of his list.

"With Nebraska, besides the tradition, it's the local team I grew up watching every week. I'd also say Nebraska has an edge in facilities when you compare them to Notre Dame and Michigan."

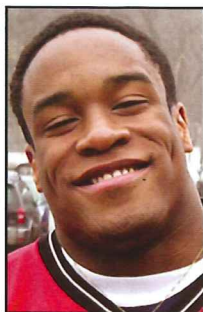
Robinson hopes to attend a session of Nebraska's summer football camp in June.

3. Collins Okafor

Another early commitment to Nebraska, the 6-1, 210-pound running back out of Omaha Westside delivered his pledge to Husker coaches in late October.

"Coach (Randy) Jordan just made me feel welcome, and I liked how he was talking to me about how he uses his (running) backs," Okafor said. "I felt like we believe in the same theory for backs — that a running back should be complete. They should be able to run, catch, block, use your eyes, have good vision and break tackles."

Okafor led Class A in rushing with more than 1,865 yards and 16 touchdowns in 2006, earning first-team Super-State honors in the process. Boasting outstanding speed (4.5-second 40-yard dash) and athleticism (33-inch vertical leap), Okafor is still somewhat of a raw athlete that is only going to get better at the college level.



Collins Okafor

RECRUITING NOTES

Quarterbacks Looking at NU

By Sean Stevens

After signing two quarterbacks in the 2007 class, each with at least three years of eligibility remaining, many fans might think that QB might not be a big priority in 2008. However a team can never have enough quality quarterbacks. Expect another two recruited in the next class.

Who are some of the likely candidates? Here's an early list — in alphabetical order:

- Peter Badovinac of Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Ill., was a visitor for Nebraska's first junior day in late February and came away impressed.

"It was awesome," Badovinac said. "I had a great time. The facilities, the academic center, the weight room, the locker room, I was just blown away by it all. They were ridiculously nice."

The 6-foot-2, 205-pounder threw for 1,893 yards with 15 touchdowns and nine interceptions as a junior. Along with Nebraska, he has been hearing from Michigan State, Colorado, Wisconsin, Notre Dame and Iowa.

- One of the top quarterbacks in California for 2008 is 6-5, 221-pound Dayne Crist of Sherman Oaks (Notre Dame). Crist has offers from NU, Iowa, LSU, Notre Dame, and Oregon, among others. Despite missing four games, Crist had an efficient junior season that saw him throw for 1,270 yards and 17 touchdowns with three interceptions.

"You know, they're definitely in the mix," he said of Nebraska. "I haven't really put together a top list of schools yet, but they're definitely in the mix."

- A player in Nebraska's back yard is Blaine Gabbert, a 6-5, 229-pounder from the St. Louis suburb of Ballwin. Gabbert is one of Rivals.com's top 100 players to watch for 2008, after throwing for more than 1,500 yards and 20 touchdowns and rushing for almost 500 yards and eight more scores.

He was another visitor for NU's junior day.

"I got to hang out and spend a lot of time with all of (the coaches) today, but I spent the most time with coach (Bill) Callahan, coach (Shawn) Watson and coach (Kevin) Cosgrove — and they're all terrific," he said. "I guess the best way I could put it is to say the entire atmosphere is awesome."

- Another top target is Texan Andrew Luck of Houston (Stratford), like Gabbert a member of Rivals.com's 2008 100 to watch. The son of former Houston Oilers quarterback Oliver Luck is a 6-3, 200-pound gunslinger, who threw for nearly 3,000 yards and 27 touchdowns (six interceptions), while running for more than 700 yards and another 10 scores as a junior.

Nebraska is in the early mix along with Texas A&M, Oklahoma State and Purdue.

- Another possibility from a neighboring state is 6-3, 181-pound James Vandenberg of Keokuk, Iowa. He also visited for junior day, after attending Nebraska's Elite Quarterback Academy last summer. Vandenberg has no written offers yet, but the NU coaches may be extending one soon.

"As a matter of fact, the coaches told me they want me to attend (the Quarterback Academy) again this year," he said. "They said if I can make it, I should, because that'll be when they decide whether or not to offer me."

Quarterbacks typically commit early, so expect to see most of these players make a decision before the end of summer. ■

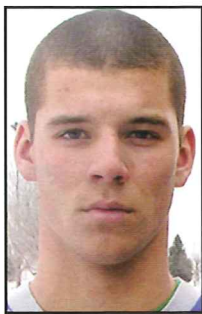
4. Sean Fisher

The latest in a long-line of Division I prospects who have come from Millard North High School, the 6-4, 200-pound safety/linebacker prospect already claims scholarship offers from Nebraska, Colorado State, Kansas, Kansas State and Vanderbilt.

The son of former Husker defensive back Todd Fisher, Sean had a standout year at safety for the Mustangs in 2006. He finished his junior campaign with 70 solo tackles and 22 assisted tackles to go along with two interceptions.

Nebraska and Iowa are his early leaders. Though Iowa has yet to offer him, Fisher has been in regular contact with the coaching staff in Iowa City. He also has heard good things about the Hawkeyes from former Mustang teammates (and current Iowa players) Adam Shada, Seth Olsen and Jeff Tarpinian.

"Yes, as of now, those two are probably my top schools of interest," Fisher said. "I'm not favoring one or the other. Well, obviously Nebraska has offered, so that is going to put them up a little higher, but, no, it is not going to affect it that much."



Sean Fisher

his first scholarship offer, Auburn coach Mark Oliver said it's likely only a matter of time before that status changes.

"He's just getting better and better and better by the day," Oliver said. "When people get him into their camp this summer, they're going to see that. When Nebraska or Kansas State see this kid, they're going to say this kid is a diamond in the rough, and he's a can't-miss type guy. He's just a great athlete."

In addition to the aforementioned prospects, other Division I caliber football prospects in the 2008 graduating class include running back/safety Grixby of Omaha

Central, tight end Tim Biere of Omaha Westside and offensive lineman Brian Thorson of Millard North.

With Steinkuhler and Robinson leading the way, this may be the most impressive class of in-state recruits in the last five years.

Rest assured, Coach Callahan and the Nebraska coaching staff have taken note. ■

For more daily recruiting information, visit huskersillustrated.com, a member of the Rivals.com network.

Copies of the Huskers Illustrated 2007 Recruiting Edition are still available. Call (800) 524-9527 or order online at shophuskersillustrated.com.

5. Troy Williams

A native of New Orleans, the 6-4, 190-pound wide receiver prospect and his family were relocated to Auburn, when Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana coast 18 months ago. Starting at receiver and defensive back in 2006, Williams helped the Bulldogs capture their first state championship in school history.

Williams has never been athletically tested at Auburn High School, but as a freshman he recorded a 37-inch vertical jump and a 4.5-second 40-yard dash in New Orleans.

Though Williams has yet to receive



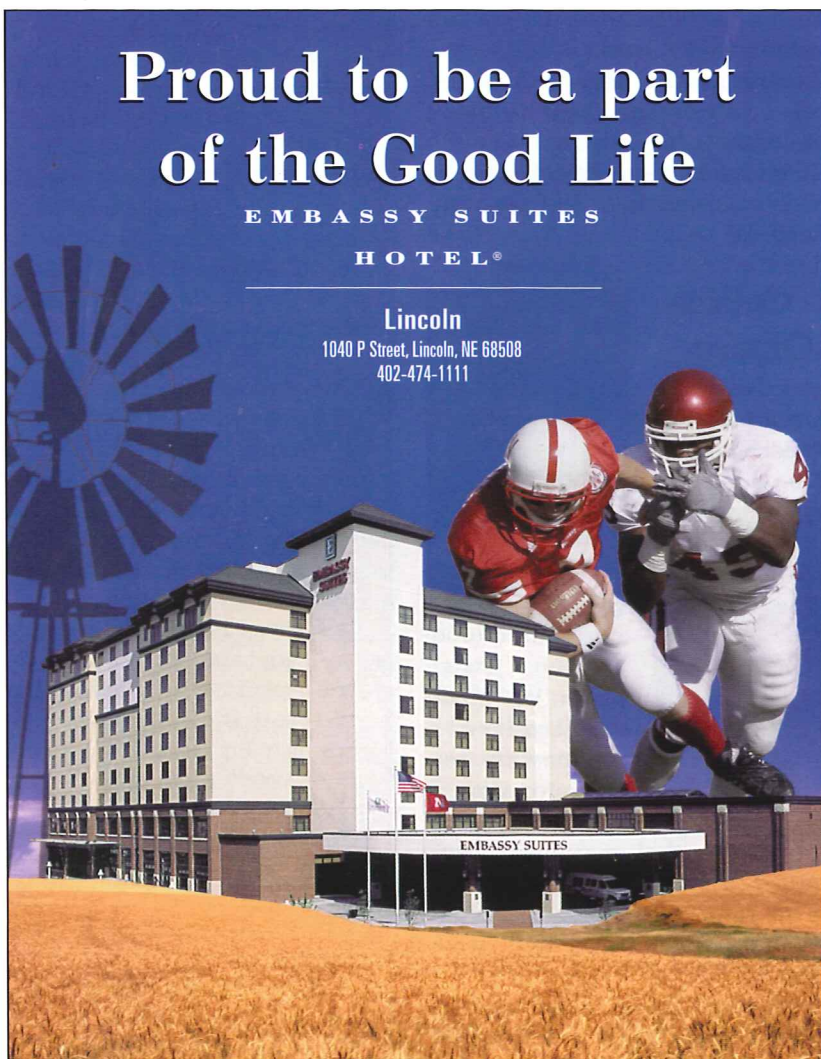
Troy Williams

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'The Way It Ought to Be'

*NU's final home game
a fitting way to remember
Richardson's career*

By Mike Babcock

Charles Richardson had to carry a chair to the front of the interview room to sit alongside teammate Marcus Perry following Nebraska's 82-77 overtime victory against Missouri at the Devaney Sports Center in late February.

Typically, one player at a time answers questions. But Richardson and Perry were both in the room, and with deadlines approaching, allowing them to answer questions together seemed expedient. So Richardson toted a chair with him.

That was symbolically fitting given Richardson's performance in the game. He had scored 12 points and finished with eight assists and two steals. And more to the point here, he had played every minute, from opening tip to the end of overtime.

"I was tired," he said. "I wanted to come out, but I didn't think it was the best option for the team if I was on the bench. I think I could do better on the floor."

He was on the floor for 45 minutes by the game clock, often diving for loose balls. By his estimation he went to the floor "about six or seven times."

That estimate was conservative, as a reporter was quick to point out. In fact, it was a wonder Richardson didn't have to be propped up in the chair.

"My body never hurts when I hit the floor," he said.

Though anyone who had watched the game might have disagreed, Richardson claimed he had paced himself. "There are times when I slow the ball up, not for the sake of the team but for myself because I need to save my energy," he said.

Nebraska's best chance for success was with him on the court.

So "I'll just keep playing," he said. "I love this game."

No one would question that after watching Richardson play.

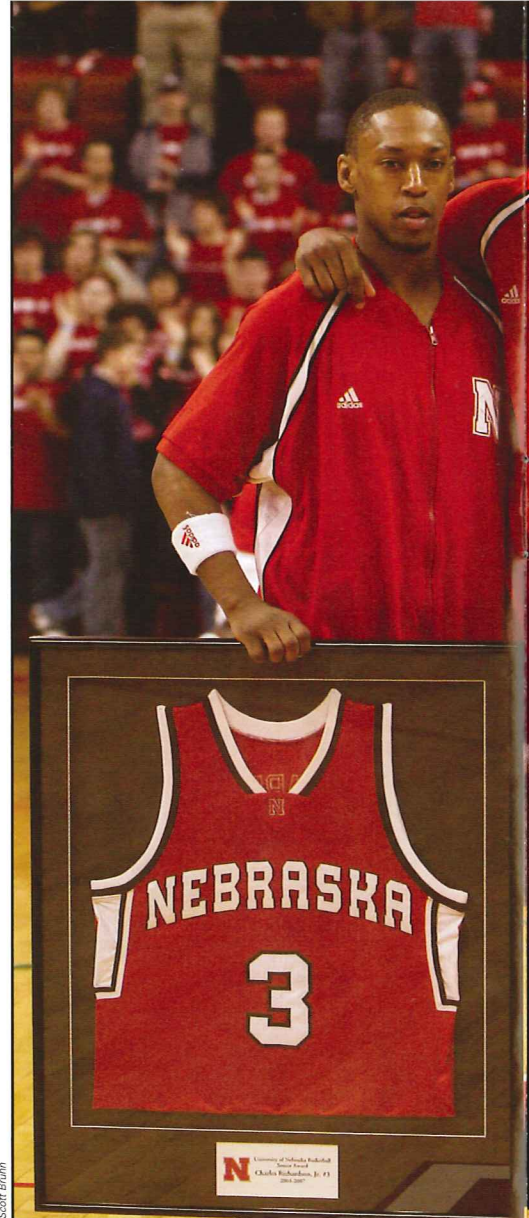
"I told the team there's not a day, practice or whatever it may be, that he hasn't walked through those doors, not only himself but his teammates knowing he's given everything he can to this team," coach Doc Sadler said. "There's not many players in college basketball who can do that. And he definitely can do that."

Sadler was speaking after the final regular-season game against Oklahoma State at the Sports Center, Senior Night for Richardson and Perry.

"They've given so much to this program, and the way they went out, again, tonight is a credit to them," said Sadler. "That's the way it ought to be."

And so it was. The Cornhuskers won 85-73.

Both Richardson and Perry played



the entire game, save for the final seconds when Sadler took a timeout so they could leave the court to an ovation.

"I think the emotion brought a lot out of everybody," Richardson said. "There was a lot of energy on that court. Some guys shed some tears. It really hit them that this was the last home game. And we weren't going down without a fight."

Three days later, Nebraska went down in a rematch against Oklahoma State, 54-39, in the opening round of the Big 12 Tournament at Oklahoma City.

The Cornhuskers put up a fight then, too. But the tank was empty.

The final home game was a more fitting way to remember Richardson's four-year career. After talking to reporters in the interview room and showering, he emerged from the locker room dressed in red from head to toe. He wore a red suit with a red



Seniors Charles Richardson (left) and Marcus Perry were honored at the final home game March 5.

dots.

He stood in front of a large poster of himself hanging on the wall for an interview with a television reporter then reflected on his time at Nebraska.

"You don't appreciate something like this when you first get on campus. You don't appreciate nothing 'til it's gone, when it's all over like it is tonight. I shed some tears and got real emotional. It finally hit me that the season is at an end," he said.

"I never thought I'd get to this point. It took a long time, but now that it's over, it seems like it was just yesterday that I was a freshman."

Richardson was a stabilizing factor during the coaching transition from Barry Collier to Sadler, a steadying influence who held the team together.

"A lot of guys were talking about leaving," Richardson said. "I said, 'Hey, guys, we've just got to work with what we've got here. I'm pretty sure the guy they bring in is going to help us.'"

He was right about that. Sadler got the most out of his first Nebraska team.

"A lot of people expected us to finish last (in the Big 12)," Richardson said. "Even though one of our goals was to make the NCAA Tournament this year, another goal was not to finish last in this league, and we did everything we could to make a run."

As Sadler pointed out, Richardson certainly did everything he could.

Men's Results

Overall: 17-14/Big 12: 6-10

Nov. 14	Nebraska-Omaha	W 76-62
Nov. 18	Creighton	W 73-61
Nov. 21	Lubbock Christian	W 65-42
Nov. 27	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	W 71-42
Nov. 29	North Texas	W 76-57
Dec. 2	@Rutgers	L 75-73
Dec. 9	@Oregon	L 68-56
Dec. 17	Alabama A&M	W 82-55
Dec. 20	*Wyoming	W 73-58
Dec. 22	*Hawaii	L 81-72
Dec. 23	*Houston	W 70-57
Dec. 30	**Miami	W 82-67
Jan. 3	Savannah State	W 81-53
Jan. 6	Western Kentucky	W 82-71
Jan. 10	@Iowa State	L 71-62
Jan. 17	@Oklahoma	L 70-53
Jan. 20	Colorado	W 71-50
Jan. 24	Texas	L 62-61
Jan. 27	@Kansas St.	L 61-45
Jan. 29	Kansas	L 76-56
Feb. 3	@Missouri	W 66-61
Feb. 6	@Texas Tech	W 61-59
Feb. 10	Texas A&M	L 66-55
Feb. 13	Kansas State	W 74-63
Feb. 17	@Kansas	L 92-39
Feb. 21	@Baylor	L 63-59
Feb. 24	Missouri	W 82-77 ot
Feb. 28	Iowa State	L 69-63
Mar. 3	@Colorado	L 73-69
Mar. 5	Oklahoma State	W 85-73
Mar. 8	***Oklahoma State	L 54-39
*Rainbow Classic, Honolulu, Hawaii		
**Orange Bowl Classic, Miami, Fla.		
***Big 12 Tournament, Oklahoma City		

And that's how he wants fans to remember him, that he was "a great person to be around, very friendly, just gets along with everybody, just a very good person," he said.

In retrospect, though it hadn't always seemed so, time had passed quickly. "When it's all said and done, it was just a snap of the fingers," said Richardson. ■

vest, white dress shirt and red and black striped tie with white polka

FINAL MEN'S STATISTICS

Player	GP-GS	I—TOTAL—I		I—3-PTS—I		I—REBOUNDS—I										Blk	Stl	Pts	Avg
		FG-FGA	Pct	3FG-A	Pct	FT-FTA	Pct	Off	Def	Tot	Avg	PF	FO	A	TO				
Maric, Aleks	30-30	203-359	.565	3-10	.300	147-216	.681	75	185	260	8.7	80	1	24	97	33	15	556	18.5
Anderson, Ryan	28-25	103-219	.470	48-111	.432	29-39	.744	28	101	129	4.6	68	4	46	56	4	25	283	10.1
Perry, Marcus	27-17	81-194	.418	67-163	.411	27-28	.964	15	54	69	2.6	38	0	38	29	6	20	256	9.5
White, Jamel	22-16	66-150	.440	20-58	.345	53-65	.815	14	46	60	2.7	63	1	53	32	5	17	205	9.3
Richardson, Charles	31-31	73-193	.378	28-87	.322	68-81	.840	14	90	104	3.4	69	1	179	71	2	56	242	7.8
Henry, Sek	31-18	62-155	.400	17-67	.254	39-65	.600	18	43	61	2.0	54	2	52	52	5	23	180	5.8
Velander, Paul	27-13	33-88	.375	32-85	.376	19-23	.826	4	24	28	1.0	54	1	19	20	2	19	117	4.3
Strowbridge, Jay-R	29-13	36-88	.409	25-54	.463	17-24	.708	10	32	42	1.4	43	0	40	25	1	5	114	3.9
Ledsome, Jim	14-4	13-22	.591	0-0	.000	8-13	.615	23	12	35	2.5	22	0	2	12	5	5	34	2.4
Marks, Kyle	18-0	15-25	.600	0-2	.000	6-15	.400	5	15	20	1.1	30	2	1	12	3	5	36	2.0
Smith, Mike	20-0	9-22	.409	3-10	.300	6-14	.429	4	3	7	0.4	4	0	5	3	0	4	27	1.4
Douse, Kris	8-0	3-10	.300	1-1	1.000	0-0	.000	3	4	7	0.9	9	0	1	8	1	5	7	0.9
Balham, Chris	26-0	3-9	.333	0-0	.000	7-15	.467	10	12	22	0.8	19	0	1	6	4	3	13	0.5
Laam, Choul	5-0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	2-2	1.000	0	1	1	0.2	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.4
Goldenstein, Chase	1-0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Krenk, Nick	9-0	0-2	.000	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0	0	0	0.0	3	0	1	4	0	3	0	0.0
Nelson, Ben	3-0	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0.0
TEAM								37	46	83	2.7	2			12				
Total	31	700-1537	.455	244-650	.375	428-600	.713	260	668	928	29.9	560	14	462	441	71	205	2072	66.8
Opponents	31	686-1593	.431	236-624	.378	381-541	.704	317	677	994	32.1	577	-	386	472	97	183	1989	64.2

BASKETBALL NOTES

SENIOR NIGHT SUCCESS

Charles Richardson and Marcus Perry made their final home game memorable. Though he scored only three points, Richardson was credited with eight assists and five steals, while Perry tied his career high by scoring 25 points — and hitting 7-of-10 from 3-point range.

Despite not being able to practice because of a foot injury, Perry turned in one of the best 3-point shooting seasons in school history. His 67 3-pointers rank sixth on the all-time list.

Richardson finished with 179 assists, the third most by a Cornhusker in a season. Brian Carr has the top two totals, 237 in 1985 and 201 in 1986. Richardson played 1,126 minutes this season, to rank sixth on Nebraska's all-time list.

MARVELOUS MARIC

Junior center Aleks Maric earned second-team Big 12 recognition for the conference coaches and Associated Press and was included on the AP All-Improved Team after averaging 18.5 points and 8.7 rebounds. He scored 555 points this season and will go into his senior season at No. 22 on the Cornhuskers' career-scoring list, with a realistic chance to climb to at least fifth.

1. Dave Hoppen (1983-86)	2,167 points
2. Eric Piatkowski (1991-94)	1,934
3. Jerry Fort (1973-76)	1,882
4. Andre Smith (1978-81)	1,717
5. Jaron Boone (1993-96)	1,609
22. Aleks Maric (2004-present)	1,111

Maric pulled down 260 rebounds this season and ranks ninth on Nebraska's career list. Barring something unexpected, he should finish second on the all-time list.

1. Venson Hamilton (1996-99)	1,080 rebounds
2. Leroy Chalk (1969-71)	782
3. Dave Hoppen (1983-86)	773
4. Rich King (1988-91)	761
5. Andre Smith (1978-81)	753
9. Aleks Maric (2004-present)	680

Oh yes, and he will return next season, after investigating the possibility of leaving after his sophomore year by way of the NBA draft. Asked about the possibility of an early departure now, he told the Lincoln Journal Star, "I'd be crazy. I'd be fooling myself if I personally think I'm ready."

He said when he made the decision it was for his final two years, not one. "I mean, I'm one year shy of getting my degree," he told the Journal Star. "Why not just stay one more year?"

That's good news for Sadler and Cornhusker fans, of course.

Maric also was a second-team all-district selection.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVER

Sophomore Paul Velandar was among 10 players named to the Academic All-Big 12 first team. The walk-on from Blacksburg, Va., played in 27 games, starting the final regular-season game against Oklahoma State at the Sports Center and scoring a career-high 20 points.

He made 4-of-9 from 3-point range and finished 31-of-80 from that distance.

Velandar started in place of freshman Ryan Anderson, who was suspended by the conference for a scuffle in the previous game against Colorado. Velandar "got the open shots that Ryan has got all year," Sadler said. And he took advantage of the opportunity, which came as no surprise.

"Paul, besides Marcus (Perry), may be our best shooter," said Sadler.



Paul Velandar



NU players react to the NCAA Tournament announcement.

BACK IN THE NCAA

Despite struggling down the stretch, coach Connie Yori's women earned an NCAA Tournament bid for the first time since 2000. The bid was the seventh in school history. The 22-9 Huskers were a No. 9 seed and were to play No. 8 Temple (24-7) at Raleigh, N.C., on March 18.

Nebraska snapped a four-game losing streak in its final regular-season game against Colorado at the Devaney Sports Center, defeating the Buffaloes 90-70. Yori called the victory the program's most significant in seven years because, she said, it put the Huskers in the NCAA Tournament.

Apparently she was right because they lost their next game in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Tournament at Oklahoma City (as the fourth seed), falling to Iowa State 79-76 in overtime.

GOING OUT IN STYLE

The Colorado game also was Senior Night as a Sports Center crowd of 5,763 watched Kiera Hardy, Chelsea Aubry, Jelena Spiric and Ashley Ford play there for the final time.

All four scored in double figures, contributing to the season-high total of 90 points. Ford finished with 13 points, including three 3-pointers, and seven assists. All were career highs.

She went into the game averaging 2.6 points.

The game also was special for Spiric, who was playing in front of her parents for the first time in the United States. She is from Belgrade, Serbia.

"What a great way for them to end their careers at home," said Yori. "The last four games they have overcome adversity, adversity and more adversity."

DYNAMIC DUO

Hardy and sophomore Kelsey Griffin earned first-team All-Big 12 recognition from the conference coaches, becoming the first two Huskers to be so honored in the same season. Hardy was only the third Husker to earn first-team honors in three seasons, while Griffin was the fourth Nebraska sophomore to be picked first-team all-conference. She ranked in the top 10 in both scoring and rebounding.

Aubrey, the second-best 3-point shooter in the conference and a three-year Husker captain, received honorable mention on the coaches' team.

Hardy also was among seven players on the All-Region 5 Team selected by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. The last Husker picked for the team was Anna DeForge in 1998. All-region honorees are candidates for the WBCA All-America team to be announced at the end of March.

Nebraska would have to advance a couple of rounds in the NCAA Tournament for Hardy to climb any higher on the school career-scoring list. She went into the tournament with 1,907 points.

Hardy already holds the Husker career record for 3-point shots.

1. Karen Jennings (1990-93)	2,405 points
2. Maurice Ivy (1985-88)	2,131
3. Amy Stephens (1986-89)	1,976
4. Kiera Hardy (2003-present)	1,907
5. Nicole Kubik (1997-00)	1,867



Chelsea Aubry and Kiera Hardy (21) celebrate at Senior Night Feb. 27.

WOMEN'S SCHEDULE

Overall: 22-9/Big 12: 11-5

Nov. 10	*Arizona State	L 87-60
Nov. 12	*Florida Atlantic	W 93-53
Nov. 13	*New Mexico	W 66-59
Nov. 17	Cal State Fullerton	W 76-62
Nov. 24	@UC Irvine	W 80-66
Nov. 26	@USC	W 72-65
Nov. 28	Texas-Pan American	W 77-37
Dec. 5	Minnesota	L 74-65
Dec. 9	Michigan	W 87-47
Dec. 16	Northwestern	W 73-58
Dec. 19	@Creighton	W 60-57
Dec. 21	Nicholls State	W 80-42
Dec. 28	**NC State	W 94-74
Dec. 29	**Florida	W 81-73
Jan. 3	@Texas	W 79-75
Jan. 6	Oklahoma	L 77-69
Jan. 13	@Kansas	W 63-54
Jan. 17	Kansas State	W 70-63
Jan. 20	@Missouri	W 76-66
Jan. 24	@Texas A&M	L 66-65
Jan. 27	Kansas	W 78-58
Jan. 31	Iowa State	W 62-49
Feb. 3	Baylor	W 76-67
Feb. 7	@Kansas State	W 62-55
Feb. 10	@Colorado	W 54-44
Feb. 14	Texas Tech	L 70-69
Feb. 17	Missouri	L 65-53
Feb. 20	@Iowa State	L 64-53
Feb. 24	@Oklahoma State	L 63-60
Feb. 27	Colorado	W 90-70
Mar. 7	***Iowa State	L 79-76 ot
Mar. 18	****Temple	

*Veterans Day Classic, Tempe, Ariz.

**State Farm Classic, Gainesville, Fla.

***Big 12 Tournament, Oklahoma City

****NCAA Tournament, Raleigh, N.C.

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Hardly

Junior second baseman Opitz understands how to play with freedom

By Mike Babcock

When conferences on the pitching mound break up, Jake Opitz typically remains with the pitcher, offering a final word or two. Watch him, coach Mike Anderson said recently. "We break, and he'll be one of the last ones to leave."

Opitz sticks around to encourage the pitcher to buckle down and get the job done, often in no uncertain terms. He has an uncanny ability to sense whether Anderson plans to replace a pitcher or just talk about what isn't being done properly.

"I'll say what I need to say, and he'll make a comment, 'I'll take care of it.' Before I'm even saying anything, he knows what I'm doing," said Anderson.

That's one of the ways the junior second baseman provides leadership. Another is the example he sets not only by his play but also by his attitude.

No one on the team is better at that. "I talk about freedom all the time, and when I say 'freedom,' I want our kids not to have tension, guilt, pressure, whatever you call it, just play with freedom. And he does that better than anybody," Anderson said.

"He's got a carefree attitude that he wants to win."

In this case, carefree shouldn't be mistaken for lack of focus or intensity.

"The way to win is to play aggressively, not play timidly," said Anderson.

Opitz is hardly timid. He wouldn't bat in the middle of the order if he were.

Last season, his first as a starter, you'd find Opitz batting sixth or seventh in the order. He was productive enough, hitting .293 with two home runs, nine doubles, three triples and 27 runs-batted-in, to earn All-Big 12 honorable mention.

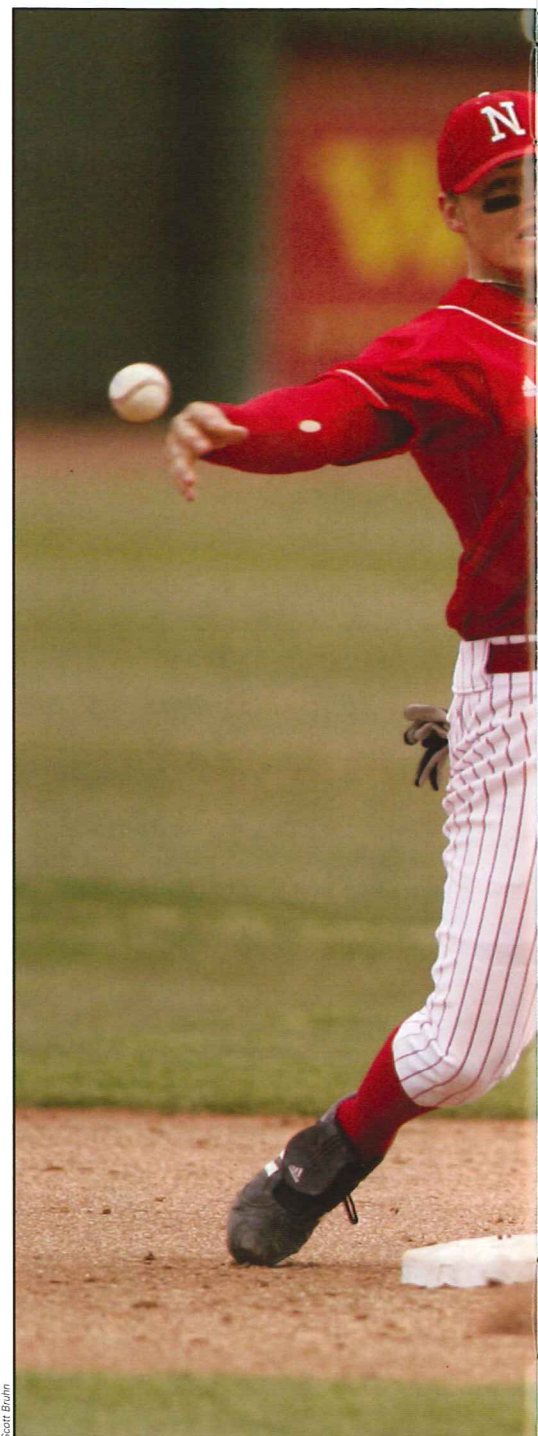
More significantly, perhaps, he hit .355 with runners in scoring position. "What I saw out of him was somebody that was a clutch hitter," Anderson said.

So before the season-opening tournament at Texas-Arlington, Anderson went to Opitz and told him he would be batting in the middle of the order. He had demonstrated the ability to produce in the clutch. Plus, he's a left-handed hitter.

His dad, Jeff, saw to that. Jeff Opitz, who played baseball at Metro State College in Denver, was his son's baseball coach through the eighth grade.

"He pretty much taught me everything I know," Jake said. "He made me hit left-handed since I was a little guy, so that's helped me, I think."

Left-handed hitting middle infielders are something of a luxury, at any level. Most infielders bat the same



Scott Babin

way they throw, and for second base, shortstop and third base, that means right-handed. "I'd say probably 90

Timid



In addition to hitting .293 a year ago in his first full year as a starter, Jake Opitz recorded 169 assists, tying him for the most by a Husker second baseman.

much marketability for a team and, I mean, for an organization."

Nebraska's big bats are swung by Andrew Brown, Andy Gerch and Ryan Wehrle, all right-handed hitters.

Anderson didn't want three consecutive right-handed hitters in the middle of the order, for one thing. And Brown, the projected clean-up hitter, was suspended and didn't make the first Texas trip, for another.

That opened up the opportunity for Opitz, who batted fourth and fifth during the four-game tournament. He managed only three hits in 15 at-bats with one RBI and two runs scored. Even so, "he had our best weekend," Anderson said. "His stats didn't show that, but he had four balls that he scorched and didn't get anything for it. It showed me that, 'you know what, this guy might be a perfect four-hole hitter.'"

The next week, at the Rice Invitational, Opitz went 6-for-10, with a pair of doubles, and scored five runs to earn Big 12 player-of-the-week honors. He drove in only one run, however. The RBIs didn't come until the third weekend.

Before putting him fourth in the order, Anderson told Opitz, "I don't want you to think you have to go up there and start hitting home runs."

At the Stetson Invitational, he hit two home runs, as many as all of last season, and drove in eight runs. Though Anderson doesn't want him trying to hit home runs, he has power to do so. "I think he'll run some balls out of there," said Anderson. "My hope is that he hits, maybe, eight home runs, something like that on the year."

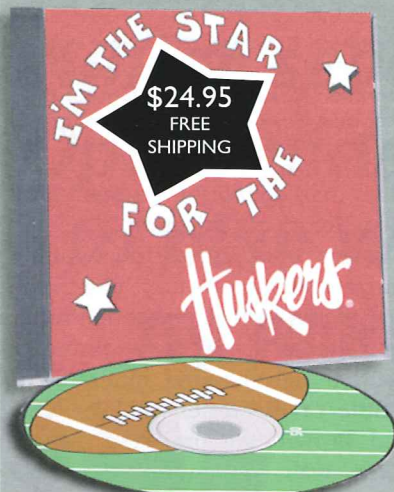
What Anderson wants most from Opitz, however, is "a lot of RBIs." ■

percent of infielders are right-handed (hitters)," Anderson said. "Alex Gordon's big commodity is that he's a

third baseman who's a left-handed hitter. What that does for a lineup, what it does for you is, it gives you so

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BASEBALL NOTES

BEACH BOY

Junior infielder Jeff Tezak, a transfer from Palomar College, is another left-handed hitter (he's a switch-hitter, actually) Anderson has considered for the middle of the order. His performance in the Alabama series was evidence as to why.

Tezak went 8-for-11 (.727) in the three games to earn Big 12 player-of-the-week recognition. Included in the hits were a home run and two doubles. He was 5-for-5 and singled in the winning run in a 4-3 victory in the second game.

He's from the San Diego area, beginning his collegiate career at Cal State-Northridge, and takes some good-natured guff about "my surfer thing," he said. "But I don't even surf. Beach volleyball is my thing. I love beach volleyball."

He misses being 10 minutes from the beach. "Last summer I'd just drive to the beach whenever I got stuck in traffic," he said. "That's what I don't miss, traffic, not at all."

Oh yes, and even though the Beach Boys and their surfing music were long before his time, "I do like that kind of music, laid back," Tezak said.

The first time Tezak (who didn't enroll until second semester) stepped on Hawks Field was March 7, after 29 indoor practices. Even though the temperature that day was below freezing and a huge snowdrift extended from second to third base just behind the infield dirt, Anderson was determined to practice outside. "We were going outside. I swear to God, we were going outside," Anderson said following the practice. "It did not matter. It would have had to be an absolute blizzard (not to)."

Besides, with football testing on Pro Day in the Hawks Championship Center, "that (outside) was our only option," he said. "It's just a part of it. It's unusual."

"I don't know how to say it any other way."

No one complained about the weather, according to freshman outfielder DJ Belfonte. "We really don't have a choice," he said with a laugh. "Coach 'A' (Anderson) told us at the very beginning, 'I don't want anybody saying you're cold out there.'"

He wouldn't have anyway. "As a matter of fact, I was happy to get out there because it gets really old being inside," Belfonte said.



Jeff Tezak

SPEEDY CATCHER

Jeff Lanning breaks the stereotype of the slow, plodding catcher. He ran on a two-time state-champion 4x400-meter relay at Ankeny (Iowa) High School.

As a youngster, he played in the outfield as well as catching. "I don't know why I picked it," he said of the latter. "I don't know if it was a big mistake or what because it's the hardest position out there. But I love it. It's fun."

"You get to control the game. Everybody's looking at you on the field. It's fun to block balls, fun to get hit every once in a while, the pain."

That's a catcher's mentality, for sure.



Jeff Lanning

HEARTLESS

Sophomore Erik Bird, who succeeded Brett Jensen as the baseball team's closer, thrives on the pressure of pitching in the late innings with the game on the line. "My friends always tell me I don't have a heart because I don't ever show emotion toward anything," he said. "My parents are the same way. 'We can't ever read you. You don't ever show any emotion.' I think that's a good thing."

Relief pitchers in general and closers in particular, like football defensive backs, need short memories. "If they're going to hit a walk-off home run, the next day's just going to be another day," said Bird. "I don't know if I was raised not to have emotion, but I do have a real short memory about those kinds of things."



Erik Bird

TELEVISION TIME

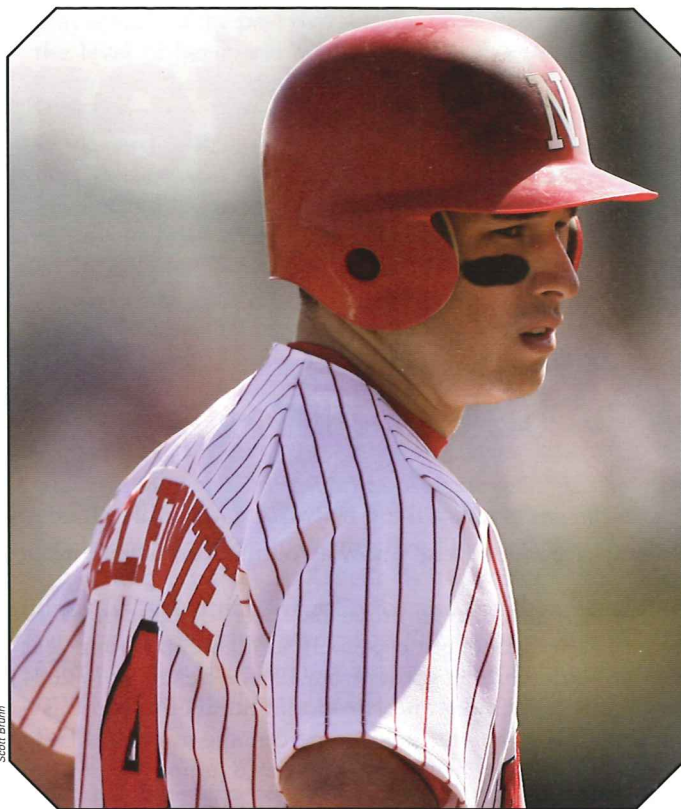
The Nebraska baseball team will have the potential for some national exposure this season. Two games involving the Cornhuskers are among six from the Big 12 scheduled for telecast by FSN, which reaches more than 82 million cable and satellite homes nationwide with its regional affiliates. Nebraska's games at Oklahoma on April 14 and against Texas at Hawks Field on April 21 are set to be telecast.

The Big 12 Tournament championship game on May 27 also is scheduled for telecast by FSN. The tournament is set for May 23-27 at Oklahoma City.

The Husker Sports Network is carrying all of the remaining games, including non-conference, with the regular broadcast team of Jim Rose and Randy Lee being joined by Sports Nightly's Lane Grindle for selected games.

The Husker baseball network includes 22 stations across Nebraska, including 50,000-watts stations KFAB in Omaha (1110) and KRVN in Lexington (880). The broadcasts also can be heard on Huskers.com. ■

10 QUESTIONS



Scott Bruhn

Credit Nebraska pitching coach Dave Bingham with an assist in the recruitment of DJ Belfonte, a big assist as it turns out, though unintentional. Bingham established the Kansas City Sluggers organization, in which Belfonte began participating when he was junior high age. And Bingham told the young players that if they wanted to excel, they had to “get to the point where you could play at schools like Nebraska,” said Belfonte. “He always said, ‘Nebraska.’

“So I looked up to places like that.”

As a result, when he and his parents began considering schools — they took the initiative in recruiting — he told them he wanted to play for the Cornhuskers.

“I told my dad right off the bat,” Belfonte said. “And he actually contacted Nebraska, let them know I was interested. That’s the approach we took.”

Nebraska was certainly interested in the dual-sport athlete at Rockhurst High. Baseball America rated him the No. 3 high school prospect in the state.

The Belfonte name was familiar in Kansas City beyond his success in baseball and football. His family founded the Belfonte Ice Cream and Dairy Foods Company.

If you could eat only one thing for the next month, what would it be?

“I don’t know if the coaches would like to hear this, but I’m a Chipotle guy, Chipotle burrito. I’m picky on the Chipotle burrito. I get it the same way every time.”

Who’s the funniest guy on the team?

“(Andy) Gerch kind of took me under his wing in the outfield. I have a pretty close relationship with him. A lot of people look at him as a quiet kid, but he’s probably one of the

with

DJ BELFONTE

**5-10/175 Fr. Outfielder
Kansas City, Mo.**

funniest kids. It’s what he says. It’s how he comes off. He’s just one of those guys that make me laugh all the time.”

If you had only three songs to load onto your MP3 player, what would they be?

“I like ‘The Sweet Escape’ by Gwen Stefani and Akon. I’m a big Akon guy. I like ‘This is Why I’m Hot’ by MIMS. I like rap. And then the last one, I’d have to go with ‘Throw Some D’s.’ To tell you the truth, I don’t even know who does it.”

If your life were made into a movie, whom would you pick to play the part of you?

“It would have to be a good-looking guy. I don’t know. I’ve had a lot of people tell me I look like A. C. Slater (Mario Lopez) on *Saved by the Bell*. I don’t know if I would want him . . . John Travolta, I’m a John Travolta fan.”

What’s the best movie you’ve seen recently?

“It would have to be ‘The Departure’ (The Departed). I think that’s what it’s called. We were watching it on the bus. It’s kind of like the up-dated ‘Goodfellas.’”

If you could spend 30 minutes with a celebrity, sports or otherwise, whom would you pick and what would you want to know about the person?

“I’d pick Rickey Henderson . . . no, I take that back. I’d pick Deion Sanders. I’d ask him what was his favorite dance he did in a game? I kind of did something like that, but I got yelled at pretty fast. I loved watching Deion Sanders. I love a guy who can just have fun like that. He’s one of the best, plus he was an all-around athlete. He’s just one of those guys I loved to watch play, plus he was a Cowboy. I’m a Cowboys and Chiefs fan; I don’t know if you can be both.”

When you cook for yourself, what’s your specialty?

“There’s not much cooking for myself because I can’t do much. Ramen noodles, it’s easy, and I could eat that for month. All you do is put a little packet in and heat it up.”

What’s your favorite ice cream flavor?

“Cookies ‘n cream. Everybody asks me about that, ‘You have to have the fridge stacked (with ice cream).’ I bet if you went to my house right now, you might find one carton, and that would be vanilla. We’re a pretty simple family. As surprising as it is, I never ate ice cream. But if I had to pick right now, it would be cookies ‘n cream.”

What’s one thing you would absolutely not eat?

“I pretty much would eat anything. But I know there’s something I wouldn’t eat. Somebody on the team was talking about eating frog legs last weekend. I couldn’t eat frog legs.”

If someone gave you \$100,000 and you had to spend it, on what would you spend it?

“In a selfish way, I’d probably just go by myself clothes and shoes, and I’d probably give some to my grandma because she’s always talking about if I ever do go pro, I’d have to share the money with her. I like clothes, as much as I don’t have a lot here. I like Polo shirts. A lot of the guys on the team are Polo guys.” ■

Nothing Better

Shortstop Porter loves everything about defense

By Terry Douglass

For Nebraska shortstop Devin Porter, the best possible moment on the softball diamond goes something like this: A speedy batter attempts to slap hit into the hole, but Porter sprints to glove the ball, plants and fires a rocket across the infield to beat the runner at first base by two feet.

Forget hitting home runs. In Porter's mind, there's nothing better than making a jaw-dropping play in the field.

"I would have to say they're both about equal, but I'd still have to say throwing out slappers by two feet feels the best," said Porter, a 5-foot-4 senior from Lakewood, Calif. "When you know they're fast, but you still throw them out — that feels great."

"At this level, about every team can hit the ball well, but if you don't have good defense, you're probably not going to win."

And Porter said the defense fun doesn't end with just throwing runners out.

"I like to show off my arm, obviously, but I also love when people try to steal because I like tagging them out," Porter said. "I just have a lot of fun with that. I love everything about defense."

Nebraska coach Rhonda Revelle said this type of fixation with defense isn't totally uncommon for players at Porter's position.

"I think there are a lot of shortstops like that — Amanda Buchholz was like that, too," Revelle said of the former

DEVIN PORTER **SENIOR SHORTSTOP**

Nebraska standout who's now a volunteer assistant for the Huskers.

Porter's desire to improve has been evident in every aspect of her game, but especially in the field. A four-year starter, Porter cut her errors from 18 as a freshman in 2004 to 16 as a sophomore and sliced that number to eight as a junior last season. Her fielding percentage improved from .882 as a freshman to .946 as a junior.

Through Nebraska's first 22 games this season, Porter has made just four errors and has a .938 fielding percentage.

"That's the big key with Devin, and it's a real testament to her focus and hard work," Revelle said. "We've always featured her arm — her arm is just a real talent — and it's in the other aspects of her game where she's really improved."

"It's been small things like communicating with teammates, so assignments are not missed, to learning to read different angles. She's done a lot to enhance herself and then just build upon the talents that she already has."

Especially in the last two seasons, Revelle said the feisty Porter has become "more of a sponge to the game," desiring to learn more and more all the time.

"To come in to our program and start right away as a freshman, there was just so much to take in, and I think her mind was reeling, and it was sometimes overload to be coached too much," Revelle said. "As she got more games



Scott Bruhn

under her belt and got more comfortable out there, she became very willing to be tutored."

Porter, who was named Nebraska's most improved player each of the past two seasons, said the desire to raise the level of her game is mindset that has been with her throughout her career.

"Each year, I come back a lot more confident, and I work hard in the offseason on whatever I can to get better," Porter said. "I guess I'm the type of person who's always looking to improve."

Revelle said Porter has made significant strides in terms of getting herself in the ideal position to field ground balls. She's learned to be more adept at reading hitters' swings and is anticipating better by knowing how the ball is likely to spin off the bat according to what pitch is thrown.

"Devin has learned a lot more advanced things in the game that have allowed her to be in better position and at the right place at the right time," Revelle said. "It's not just about fielding and throwing, but it's a lot of the intricacies of playing shortstop have improved for her."

As appreciative as Revelle is of Porter's defensive prowess, she stresses that Porter also has the potential to be a major offensive threat. The 2006 second-team All-Big 12 conference selection has improved her batting average from .111 as a freshman to .209 as a sophomore and .277 a year ago.

"It's just been work and work and work," Revelle said of Porter's emergence as a hitter. "She's had to take on more of an offensive mindset. Rather than just thinking that she's out there to play shortstop and let somebody

else hit, she realizes that she really is an athlete and she's committed to making a contribution on the offensive side as well."

For Porter, who batted .282 with two home runs, four doubles and eight RBIs as Nebraska started its season 15-7, increasing her production at the plate was more of a mental adjustment.

"Every at-bat, you have to go up there thinking that you're going to get a hit and you have to go up there being aggressive," Porter said. "If you have those two things in mind, then you'll probably be a successful batter."

Not only has Porter's batting average improved, but her power numbers have skyrocketed. In 2006, her eight home runs were seven more than she hit in her first two seasons combined, and she hit .360 with a .640 slugging percentage in Big 12 games.

"I guess I've just become more aggressive and had more confidence to go out and attack and be aggressive," Porter said. "There's not that much to it. When I think of hitting, all I think is 'see ball, hit ball,' so I just think it's all about being aggressive."

While Porter admits that she'd like to wind up her career as the All-Big 12 first-team shortstop, she said her main goals center around the Huskers finishing high in the conference race and qualifying for the College World Series.

"That's really the only goal I have," Porter said. "This is my last year, so I really want to play hungry, play hard and have fun." ■

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the *Grand Island (Neb.) Independent*. He can be reached at terry.douglass@msn.com.

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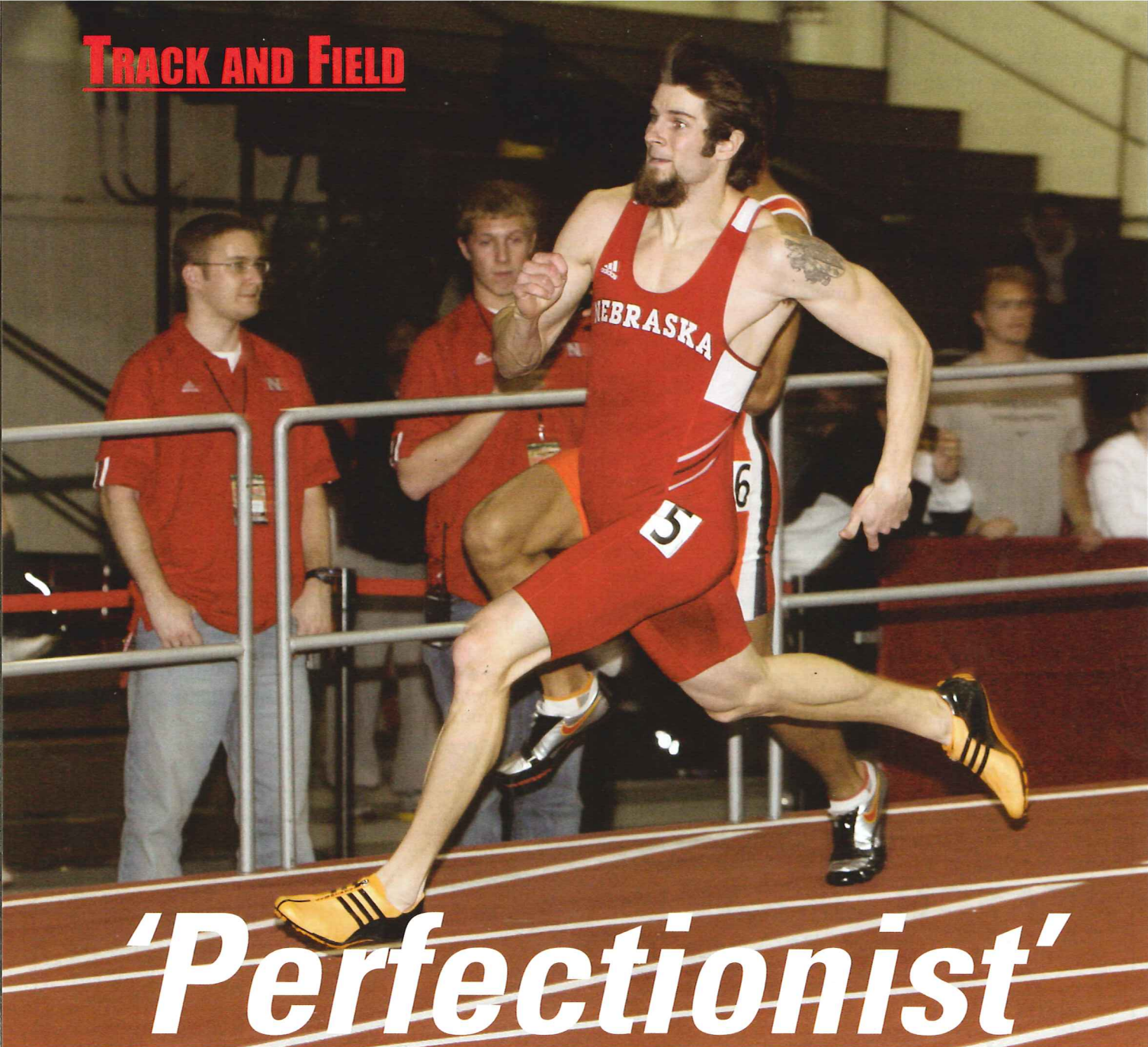
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'Perfectionist'

Senior sprinter Nate Probasco earned All-America honors for the third time when he joined three freshmen to finish eighth in the 4x400-meter relay at the NCAA Championships.

Work ethic allowed Probasco to make conversion from football player to sprinter

BY KATELYN KERKHOVE

When Nate Probasco walked up to Nebraska sprint coach Matt Martin in October of 2003, he came to the track and field team as a 235-pound football player.

Martin recruited him in high school in Scribner, Neb. But Probasco had opted to try his luck on a football field instead of a track. A year later, however, he changed his mind.

The trick was to get Martin to take him back. The two worked out a deal

in which Probasco would drop down to 190 pounds as soon as possible. It didn't help at first.

"That first semester, he was just getting killed," Martin said. "He was beat up, and his shins hurt, and everyone was just racing by him, and the other coaches were asking me what I was doing with this kid. But he was a Nebraska kid, and I wanted to keep trying with him."

Four years later, Martin's faith in Probasco has paid off.

A senior, Probasco competed in his final NCAA Indoor Championship meet in early March, running a leg of the 4x400-meter relay team, which

placed eighth overall in 3:08.68 and earned Probasco his third All-America honor.

It was the first Husker men's 4x400 relay team to place at the NCAA meet since 1994.

When asked about his experiences as a Husker track athlete so far, however, Probasco didn't choose this most recent victory as his favorite memory. In fact, Martin didn't pick it as his best memory of what Probasco has done, either.

It's what has built up to such moments that stick out in both of their minds.

Thinking back to 2004, Martin describes a spring day on the outdoor practice track with a laugh. With the Big 12 Championships just a few weeks away, Martin and the other coaches were looking for someone to fill the last leg of the 4x100 meter relay team.

With video cameras in place at the finish line, the blocks set and the gun ready to be shot, Martin told Probasco to hop in lane eight — just because there was an open lane.

"I told him it would be our work-out for the day," Martin said.

But what Martin and his staff didn't expect was to find such a close race. They had to look at the tape to believe that Probasco had won.

A couple weeks later Probasco and his teammates won the 4x100-meter relay at the Big 12 Championships. They repeated in 2005.

"Just in about eight months, I'd gone from being this big football player to this small sprinter and a Big 12 champion," Probasco said. "It's definitely the best memory I have, especially because of all of the guys on it — we're all really close."

After making a name for himself by garnering his first Big 12 title, Probasco has gone on to not only All-America status athletically, but academically as well. He was honored as a member of the NCAA Division I Track Coaches Association All-Academic Team in 2004 and 2006, and he has earned a place on the Big 12 Commissioner's Honor Roll five times.

To Martin, the adjustments Probasco has made with his body and his mindset as an athlete and a student are testaments to something Probasco's mother told him not too

long ago.

"As his mother said to me last week in Arkansas (at the NCAA Championships), he is a perfectionist," Martin said. "He is willing to work on things over and over again, whether it's the starting blocks or running mechanics. He realizes he's not the most talented guy, but he will do anything he can and go to great extremes — really push himself to make points for the team.

"Those are things that you don't teach somebody; they learn that growing up — you either got that or you don't."

As a team captain for the second time, Probasco gives the younger ath-

letes someone to whom they can look up, Martin said.

From a town of 500 people, he has proven his small town upbringing was all he needed. He has become someone freshmen and sophomores are aspiring to be, Martin said.

For Probasco, it all comes down to Husker pride.

"I know running for Nebraska and being from Nebraska I want to show other schools and states that just because they are bigger and have all these athletes to choose from, we can stay up with them," he said. "I take pride in it and try to do my best to make the state and my coaches proud." ■

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Scott Bruhn



Scott Bruhn

Junior Emily Parsons (above) captured Big 12 Conference Gymnast-of-the-Week honors for the fourth consecutive week after taking four individual event titles against Iowa State on March 11. She finished first in the vault (9.925), beam (9.90), floor (9.925) and all-around (39.575). In the men's meet against Minnesota, senior Jason Wassung (left) placed second in the all-around with a season-high of 52.95.

WRESTLING



Sophomore Chris Oliver (top) was one of six Nebraska wrestlers who qualified for the NCAA Championships. Oliver sealed his trip to nationals with a 3-2 semifinal win over 15th-ranked Michael Chandler of Missouri at the Big 12 Championships.

SWIMMING



Senior Lauren Bailey ended her career by finishing 24th in the 1,650 freestyle at the NCAA Championships in Minneapolis, Minn.

SCHOOL IS COOL



Scott Bulfin



Basketball players Ryan Anderson (above) and Kelsey Griffin (left) were among the Nebraska student-athletes who shared their messages for more than 2,300 eighth graders from every Lincoln Public Middle School at the annual "School is Cool" Celebration Feb. 19 at Lincoln North Star High School. Anderson sang a song that he wrote, while playing the keyboard. Griffin demonstrated her ability to tune out distractions while sinking a free throw, after inviting the students to be loud as well as overcoming the noise of the North Star drum line.

Scott Bulfin

CROSSWORD

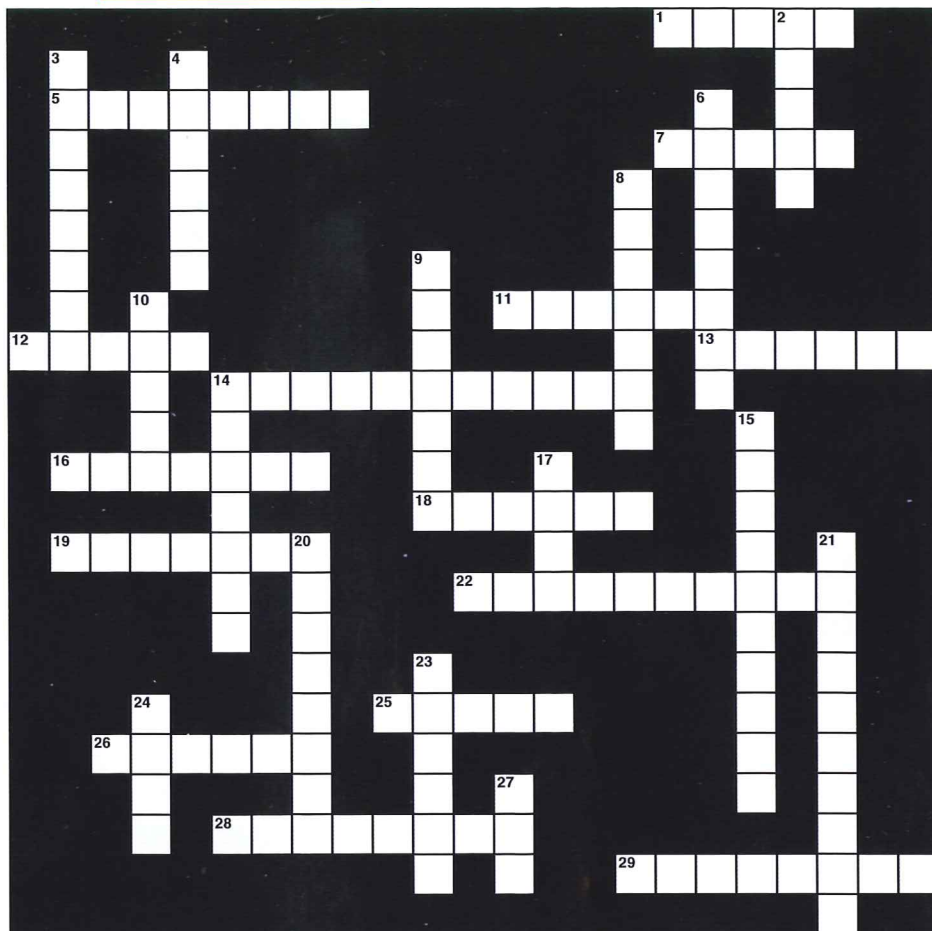
ACROSS

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Answers in May issue



HUSKERNUTZ



WHEN SPRING ROLLS AROUND FREIDA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ROCKY ENTERS A SHAKY PHASE.

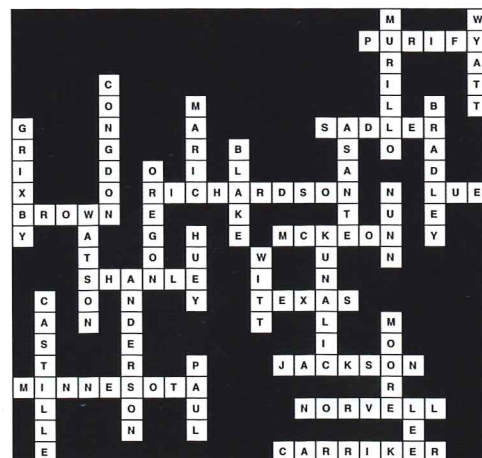
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Worth The Wait

***Cornerback Bowman can improve his draft value
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THE DECISION WAS DIFFICULT, especially based on what he was being told. People in the know projected him as a potential first-round pick in the NFL Draft. A good-sized cornerback with excellent speed is a coveted commodity in the League.

He wouldn't have been a first-round lock, of course. But Zack Bowman was hearing that he could have been "anywhere from the 12th to 40th pick."

That's enough to give a young man pause.

And Bowman did pause.

He first imagined himself in the NFL when he was 12 years old. He liked the Cincinnati Bengals then, mostly because of their helmets.

His dad was a pro football fan. His mom was, too, for that matter. And he imagined how proud they would be if he were playing in the NFL someday.

But then, any parent would be proud, "knowing that their son has been through a lot, that he set a goal he could go out and reach," said Bowman.

Why then, with the goal within his reach, did he decide to return to Nebraska for a senior season delayed by a knee injury last August?

Oh yes, the knee injury . . .

On the second day of training camp, during a one-on-one drill, Bowman leaped to intercept a pass and came down wrong, tearing his left ACL.

He sensed, immediately, that something bad had happened. "But I didn't want to think that," he said. "So I just kind of hoped for the best."

As it turned out, what was best was to rehab slowly, be patient and focus on the goal not the journey. "It's easy to quit," Bowman said. "There were times where I told myself, 'I want to quit.' But you've got to fight that from within. If the sport means a lot to you, and football really means a lot to me, it's worth the wait."

His dad reminded him of that and told him, "Junior, what's done is done." And he was able to draw on the patience he was forced to learn in high school, after suffering a broken leg during a playoff game his sophomore year.

He rehabbed and returned for his junior year, even though the break "never really healed when I was playing," he said. "But I didn't care."

"I just wanted to get out there and play."

He was the same way after the knee injury, in a funk for

about a month, lamenting his bad luck and wanting to get back on the field. But he realized the problem wouldn't be resolved unless he took his dad's advice and moved on.

That he would be projected in the draft as high as he was provided evidence of his dedication to coming back. Strength and conditioning coach Dave Kennedy and the training staff "told me, 'Don't be in any rush,'" he said.

They told him he had "plenty of time," and he would be "good to go."

That he didn't go the NFL route could be credited to an insight offered by a family friend. Bowman discussed the possibility of declaring for the draft with his parents, with coaches and with friends. And one observation made a big impression.

"He let me know the Zack Bowman people saw on film they loved, they fell in love with. And that's the guy they wanted," Bowman said. "He was like, 'You know, that's what you've got to do. They've got to see that Zack Bowman.'"

"I knew I wasn't the Zack Bowman they saw on film, so I realized if I came back for another year and did what I had to do, I was going to be that Zack Bowman."

Check that, "I have intentions of being better," he said.

He's going to be limited in spring practice. He'll go through team work, but he won't be involved in contact. Linebackers Stewart Bradley and Bo Ruud were among those who were held out of contact last spring, and they

were none the worse for it.

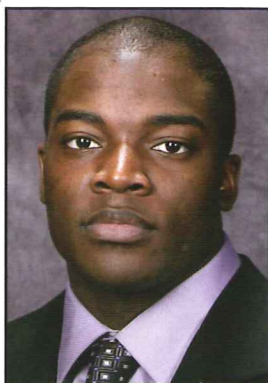
Bowman can improve his draft value if he picks up where he left off before the injury. A graph of his progress to that point would have shown a steady climb since he arrived as a junior college All-American and five-star recruit.

He started the final five games two seasons ago, after beginning as the nickel back, and his best games were those at the end. In the Alamo Bowl game victory against Michigan, he broke up five passes and intercepted one.

The first time Bowman spoke to reporters during his first training camp, he was asked if he planned to leave for the NFL after his junior season. He smiles at the recollection. He knew he wasn't going to be ready then.

Some seemed to think he was ready this year. He still wonders a little. "The tough part is, you know what you could possibly do," he said. "You've got to kind of live up to those expectations. The scary part is getting injured because teams in the NFL look at you being injured, being hurt. 'If we pick him up, will he be injury-prone?'"

Bowman is eager to prove he isn't. ■



**Zack Bowman started the
final five games of the
2005 season.**



Dream Big.